





Condensed Classics

Prepared by the Editor of Little Classics

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

BY

CHARLES DICKENS

CONDENSED

BY

ROSSITER JOHNSON



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“THE library of Osbaldistone Hall was a gloomy room, whose antique oaken shelves bent beneath the weight of the ponderous folios so dear to the seventeenth century, from which, under favor be it spoken, we have distilled matter for our quartos and octavos, and which, once more subjected to the alembic, may, should our sons be yet more frivolous than ourselves, be still farther reduced into duodecimos and pamphlets.”—ROB ROY.

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EXPLANATORY.

THIS series of Condensed Classics is not intended to raise the question whether the works shall be read in this edition or in a complete one, but to meet the question already existing, whether, in many cases, they shall be read in some such edition as this, or not read at all. The list of "books that everybody talks about and nobody reads" is, in this hurried age, growing with a rapidity that implies widespread ignorance regarding much of what is best in our literary heritage. It is in the hope of diminishing this ignorance, not of increasing it, of securing for the condensed editions many readers who would never attack the complete ones, that this series is begun.

Very few actually read every paragraph of a long novel, whatever may be their conventional notions about having it complete on their shelves; and of those who do, many, it seems to me, might be glad to re-read, in a condensation which preserves every dramatic element, those romances which once gave them pleasure, but which are now forbidden fruits, because of the serious consideration of time. Yet I would not have this edition criticised as if it professed to be an absolute improvement of the novels, but rather as a species of dramatization. Every word, with the exception of a few connecting clauses, is the author's own; and I believe that in no case has anything been omitted which helps on the story or is necessary to the delineation of a character or the graphic portrayal of a scene.

his boat, still there was business-like usage in his steady gaze. So with every lithe action of the girl, with every turn of her wrist, perhaps most of all with her look of dread or horror; they were things of usage.

"Keep her out, Lizzie. Tide runs strong here. Keep her well afore the sweep of it."

A slant of light from the setting sun glanced into the bottom of the boat, and, touching a rotten stain there which bore some resemblance to the outline of a muffled human form, colored it as though with diluted blood. This caught the girl's eye, and she shivered.

"What ails you?" said the man, immediately aware of it, though intent on the waters; "I see nothing afloat."

After a darkening hour or so, suddenly the rudder lines tightened and he steered hard towards the Surrey shore.

Always watching his face, the girl instantly answered to the action in her sculling; presently the boat swung round, quivered as from a sudden jerk, and the upper half of the man was stretched out over the stern.

The girl pulled the hood of a cloak she wore, over her head and over her face, and, looking backward, so that the front folds of this hood were turned down the river, kept the boat in that direction going before the tide. The boat had hovered about one spot; but now the banks changed swiftly, and the deepening shadows and the kindling lights of London Bridge were passed, and the tiers of shipping lay on either hand.

It was not until now that the upper half of the man came back into the boat. His arms were wet and dirty, and he washed them over the side. In his right hand he held something, and he washed that in the river too. It was money. He chinked it once, and he blew upon it once, and he spat upon it once,—“for luck,” he hoarsely said—before he put it in his pocket.

“Lizzie!”

The girl turned her face toward him with a start, and rowed in silence. Her face was very pale. He was a hook-nosed man, and with that and his bright eyes and his ruffled head, bore a certain likeness to a roused bird of prey.

“Take that thing off your face.”

She put it back.

"Here! and give me hold of the sculls. I'll take the rest of the spell."

"No, no, father! No! I can't indeed. Father!—I cannot sit so near it!"

"What hurt can it do you?"

"None, none. But I cannot bear it."

"It's my belief you hate the sight of the very river."

"I—I do not like it, father."

"As if it wasn't your living! As if it wasn't meat and drink to you!"

At these latter words the girl shivered again, and for a moment paused in her rowing, seeming to turn deadly faint. It escaped his attention, for he was glancing over the stern at something the boat had in tow.

"How can you be so thankless to your best friend, Lizzie? The very fire that warmed you when you were a babby, was picked out of the river alongside the coal barges. The very basket that you slept in, the tide washed ashore. The very rockers that I put it upon to make a cradle of it, I cut out of a piece of wood that drifted from some ship or another."

Lizzie took her right hand from the scull it held, and touched her lips with it, and for a moment held it out lovingly towards him; then, without speaking, she resumed her rowing, as another boat of similar appearance, though in rather better trim, came out from a dark place and dropped softly alongside.

"In luck again, Gaffer?" said a man with a squinting leer, who sculled her and who was alone. "I know'd you was in luck again, by your wake as you come down."

"Ah!" replied the other. "So you're out, are you?"

"Yes, pardner."

There was now a tender yellow moonlight on the river, and the new-comer, keeping half his boat's length astern of the other boat, looked hard at its track.

"I says to myself," he went on, "directly you hove in view, Yonder's Gaffer, and in luck again, by George if he ain't! Scull it is, pardner—don't fret yourself—I didn't touch him." This was an answer to a quick impatient movement on the part of Gaffer: the speaker at the same time un-

shipping his scull on that side, and laying his hand on the gunwale of Gaffer's boat and holding to it.

"He's had touches enough not to want no more, as well as I make him out, Gaffer! Been a-knocking about with a pretty many tides, ain't he, pardner? Such is my out-of-luck ways, you see! He must have passed me when he went up last time, for I was on the look-out below bridge here. I a'most think you're like the wulturs, pardner, and scent 'em out."

He spoke in a dropped voice with more than one glance at Lizzie, who had pulled on her hood again. Both men then looked with a weird interest at the wake of Gaffer's boat.

"Easy does it, betwixt us. Shall I take him aboard, pardner?"

"No," said the other. In so surly a tone that the man, after a blank stare, acknowledged it with the retort:

"—Arn't been eating nothing as has disagreed with you, have you, pardner?"

"Why, yes, I have," said Gaffer. "I have been swallowing too much of that word, Pardner. I am no pardner of yours."

"Since when was you no pardner of mine, Gaffer Hexam Esquire?"

"Since you was accused of robbing a man. Accused of robbing a live man!" said Gaffer, with great indignation.

"And what if I had been accused of robbing a dead man, Gaffer?"

"You COULDN'T do it."

"Couldn't you, Gaffer?"

"No. Has a dead man any use for money? Is it possible for a dead man to have money? What world does a dead man belong to? T'other world. What world does money belong to? This world. How can money be a corpse's? Can a corpse own it, want it, spend it, claim it, miss it? Don't try to go confounding the rights and wrongs of things in that way. But it's worthy of the sneaking spirit that robs a live man."

"I will tell you what it is—"

"No you won't. I'll tell you what it is. You've got off with a short time of it for putting your hand in the pocket of

a sailor, a live sailor, but don't think after that to come over *me* with your pardners. We have worked together in time past, but we work together no more in time present nor yet future. Let go. Cast off!"

"Gaffer! If you think to get rid of me this way—"

"If I don't get rid of you this way, I'll try another, and chop you over the fingers with the stretcher, or take a pick at your head with a boat-hook. Cast off! Pull you, Lizzie. Pull home, since you won't let your father pull."

Lizzie shot ahead, and the other boat fell astern.

CHAPTER II.

MR. AND MRS. VENEERING were bran-new people in a bran-new house in a bran-new quarter of London. Everything about the Veneerings was spick and span new. All their furniture was new, and in a state of high varnish and polish. And what was observable in the furniture, was observable in the Veneerings—the surface smelled a little too much of the workshop and was a trifle sticky.

There was an innocent piece of dinner-furniture that went upon easy castors and was kept over a livery stable-yard in Duke Street, St. James's, when not in use, to whom the Veneerings were a source of blind confusion. The name of this article was Twemlow. Being first cousin to Lord Snigsworth, he was in frequent requisition, and at many houses might be said to represent the dining-table in its normal state.

The abyss to which he could find no bottom, and from which started forth the engrossing and ever-swelling difficulty of his life, was the insoluble question whether he was Veneering's oldest friend, or newest friend.

This evening the Veneerings give a banquet.

The great looking-glass above the sideboard reflects the table and the company. Reflects the new Veneering crest, in gold and eke in silver, frosted and also thawed, a camel of all work. The Herald's College found out a Crusading ancestor for Veneering who bore a camel on his shield (or might have done it if he had thought of it), and a caravan of camels take charge of the fruits and flowers and candles, and

kneel down to be loaded with the salt. Reflects Veneering; forty, wavy-haired, dark, tending to corpulence, sly, mysterious, filmy—a kind of sufficiently well-looking veiled prophet, not prophesying. Reflects Mrs. Veneering; fair, aquiline-nosed and fingered, not so much light hair as she might have, gorgeous in raiment and jewels, enthusiastic, propitiatory, conscious that a corner of her husband's veil is over herself. Reflects Podsnap; prosperously feeding, two little light-colored wiry wings, one on either side of his else bald head, looking as like his hairbrushes as his hair, dissolving view of red beads on his forehead, large allowance of crumpled shirt-collar up behind. Reflects Mrs. Podsnap; fine woman for Professor Owen, quantity of bone, neck and nostrils like a rocking-horse, hard features, majestic headdress in which Podsnap has hung golden offerings. Reflects Twemlow; gray, dry, polite, susceptible to east wind, First-Gentleman-in-Europe collar and cravat, cheeks drawn in as if he had made a great effort to retire into himself some years ago, and had got so far and had never got any farther. Reflects mature young lady; raven locks, and complexion that lights up well when well powdered—as it is—carrying on considerably in the captivation of mature young gentleman; with too much nose in his face, too much ginger in his whiskers, too much torso in his waistcoat, too much sparkle in his studs, his eyes, his buttons, his talk, and his teeth. Reflects charming old Lady Tippins on Veneering's right; with an immense obtuse drab oblong face, like a face in a table spoon, and a dyed Long Walk up the top of her head, as a convenient public approach to the bunch of false hair behind, pleased to patronize Mrs. Veneering opposite, who is pleased to be patronized. Reflects a certain "Mortimer," another of Veneering's oldest friends; who never was in the house before, and appears not to want to come again, who sits disconsolate on Mrs. Veneering's left, and who was inveigled by Lady Tippins (a friend of his boyhood) to come to these people's and talk, and who won't talk. Reflects Eugene, friend of Mortimer; buried alive in the back of his chair, behind a shoulder—with a powder-epaulette on it—of the mature young lady, and gloomily resorting to the champagne chalice whenever proffered by the retainer who goes

around like a gloomy Analytical Chemist. Lastly, the looking-glass reflects Boots and Brewer, and two other stuffed Buffers interposed between the rest of the company and possible accidents.

The Veneering dinners are excellent dinners—or new people wouldn't come—and all goes well.

"Now, Mortimer," says Lady Tippins, rapping the sticks of her closed green fan upon the knuckles of her left hand—which is particularly rich in knuckles, "I insist upon your telling all that is to be told about the man from Jamaica."

"Give you my honor I never heard of any man from Jamaica, except the man who was a brother," replied Mortimer.

"Tobago, then."

"Nor yet from Tobago."

"Now, my dear Mrs. Veneering," quoth Lady Tippins, "I appeal to you whether this is not the basest conduct ever known in this world? I carry my lovers about, two or three at a time, on condition that they are very obedient and devoted; and here is my old lover-in-chief, the head of all my slaves, throwing off his allegiance before company!"

A grisly little fiction concerning her lovers is Lady Tippins's point. She is always attended by a lover or two, and she keeps a little list of her lovers, and she is always booking a new lover, or striking out an old lover, or putting a lover in her black list, or promoting a lover to her blue list, or adding up her lovers, or otherwise posting her book.

"I banish the false wretch from this moment, and I strike him out of my Cupidon (my name for my ledger, my dear), this very night. But I am resolved to have the account of the man from Somewhere."

"Upon my life," says Mortimer, languidly, "I find it immensely embarrassing to have the eyes of Europe upon me to this extent, and my only consolation is that you will all of you execrate Lady Tippins in your secret hearts when you find, as you inevitably will, the man from Somewhere a bore. Sorry to destroy romance by fixing him with a local habitation, but my man comes from the country where they make the Cape Wine. His name is Harmon, and he was only son of a tremendous old rascal who made his money by Dust.

He grew rich as a Dust Contractor, and lived in a hollow in a hilly country entirely composed of Dust. On his own small estate the growling old vagabond threw up his own mountain range, and its geological formation was Dust. Coal-dust, vegetable-dust, bone-dust, crockery-dust, rough dust and sifted dust,—all manner of Dust. The moral being—I believe that's the right expression—of this exemplary person, derived its highest gratification from anathematizing his nearest relations and turning them out of doors. Having begun (as was natural) by rendering these attentions to the wife of his bosom, he next found himself at leisure to bestow a similar recognition on the claims of his daughter. He chose a husband for her, entirely to his own satisfaction and not in the least to hers, and proceeded to settle upon her, as her marriage portion, I don't know how much Dust, but something immense. At this stage of the affair the poor girl respectfully intimated that she was secretly engaged to that popular character whom the novelists and versifiers call Another, and that such a marriage would make Dust of her heart and Dust of her life—in short would set her up, on a very extensive scale, in her father's business. Immediately, the venerable parent—on a cold winter's night, it is said—anathematized and turned her out. The pecuniary resources of Another were, as they usually are, of a very limited nature. I believe I am not using too strong an expression when I say that Another was hard up. However, he married the young lady, and they lived in a humble dwelling, probably possessing a porch ornamented with honeysuckle and woodbine twining, until she died. Another was so cut up by the loss of his young wife that if he outlived her a year it was as much as he did. We must now return, as the novelists say, and as we all wish they wouldn't, to the man from Somewhere. Being a boy of fourteen, cheaply educating at Brussels when his sister's expulsion befell, it was some little time before he heard of it—probably from herself, for the mother was dead; but that I don't know. Instantly, he absconded, and came over here. He must have been a boy of spirit and resource, to get here on a stopped allowance of five sous a week; but he did it somehow, and he burst in on his father, and pleaded his sister's cause. Venerable parent

promptly resorts to anathematization, and turns him out. Shocked and terrified boy takes flight, seeks his fortune, gets aboard ship, ultimately turns up on dry land among the Cape wine : small proprietor, farmer, grower—whatever you like to call it. He was discovered only the other day, after having been expatriated about fourteen years. Venerable parent dies. His will is found. It is dated very soon after the son's flight. It leaves the lowest of the range of dust-mountains, with some sort of a dwelling-house at its foot, to an old servant who is sole executor, and all the rest of the property—which is very considerable—to the son. The son's inheriting is made conditional on his marrying a girl who at the date of the will was a child of four or five years old, and who is now a marriageable young woman. Advertisement and inquiry discovered the son in the man from Somewhere, and at the present moment he is on his way home from there."

Mr. Podsnap inquires what would become of the very large fortune, in the event of the marriage condition not being fulfilled? Mortimer replies, that by special testamentary clause it would then go to the old servant above mentioned, passing over and excluding the son; also, that if the son had not been living, the same old servant would have been sole residuary legatee.

Everybody but Mortimer himself becomes aware that the Analytical Chemist is, in a ghostly manner, offering him a folded paper.

The chemist advances it under the nose of Mortimer, who unfolds the paper. Reads it, reads it twice, turns it over to look at the blank outside, reads it a third time.

"This arrives in an extraordinary opportune manner," says Mortimer then, looking with an altered face round the table: "this is the conclusion of the story of the identical man."

"Already married?" one guesses.

"Declines to marry?" another guesses.

"Codicil among the dust?" another guesses.

"Why, no," says Mortimer; "remarkable thing, you are all wrong. The story is completer and rather more exciting than I supposed. Man's drowned!"

CHAPTER III.

THE messenger who had brought the paper was a boy of about fifteen.

"Whose writing is this?" said Mortimer.

"Mine, sir."

"Who told you to write it?"

"My father, Jesse Hexam."

"Is it he who found the body?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your father?"

The boy hesitated, then said, folding a plait in the right leg of his trousers, "He gets his living alongshore."

"Is it far to your father's?"

"It's a goodish stretch, sir. I went first to your office, according to the direction of the papers found in the pockets, and there I see nobody but a chap of about my age, who sent me on here."

There was a curious mixture in the boy, of uncompleted savagery, and uncompleted civilization. His voice was hoarse and coarse, and his face was coarse, and his stunted figure was coarse; but he was cleaner than other boys of his type; and his writing, though large and round, was good.

"Were any means taken, do you know, boy, to ascertain if it was possible to restore life?" Mortimer inquired, as he sought for his hat.

"You wouldn't ask, sir, if you knew his state."

The gloomy Eugene had strolled in and made the proposal to Mortimer, "I'll go with you, if you like?" So, they all three went away together in the vehicle that had brought the boy.

In and out among vessels that seemed to have got ashore, and houses that seemed to have got afloat—among bowsprits staring into windows, and windows staring into ships—the wheels rolled on, until they stopped at a dark corner, river-washed and otherwise not washed at all, where the boy alighted and opened the door.

"You must walk the rest, sir; it's not many yards." He spoke in the singular number, to the express exclusion of Eugene. "Here's my father's sir; where the light is."

The boy lifted the latch of the door, and they passed at once into a low circular room, where a man stood before a red fire, looking down into it, and a girl sat engaged in needle-work.

"The gentleman, father."

The figure at the red fire turned, raised its ruffled head, and looked like a bird of prey.

"You're Mortimer Lightwood, Esquire; are you sir?"

"Mortimer Lightwood is my name. What you found," said Mortimer, glancing rather shrinkingly towards the bunk; "is it here?"

"'Tain't not to say here, but it's close by. I do everything reg'lar. I've giv' notice of the circumstarnc to the police, and the police have took possession of it. No time ain't been lost, on any hand. The police have put it into print already, and here's what the print says of it."

Taking up a bottle with a lamp in it, he held it near a paper on the wall, with the police heading, BODY FOUND. The two friends read the handbill as it stuck against the wall, and Gaffer read them as he held the light.

"Only papers on the unfortunate man, I see," said Lightwood, glancing from the description of what was found, to the finder.

"Only papers."

Here the girl arose with her work in her hand, and went out at the door.

"No money," pursued Mortimer; "but threepence in one of the skirt-pockets."

"Three. Penny. Pieces," said Gaffer Hexam, in as many sentences.

"The trousers pockets empty, and turned inside out."

Gaffer Hexam nodded. "But that's common. Whether it's the wash of the tide or no, I can't say. Now, here," moving the light to another similar placard, "*his* pockets was found empty, and turned inside out. And here," moving the light to another, "*her* pocket was found empty, and turned inside out. And so was this one's. And so was that one's. I can't read, nor I don't want to, for I know 'em by their places on the wall. This one was a sailor, with two anchors and a flag and G. F. T. on his arm. Look and see if he warn't."

"Quite right."

"This one was the young woman in gray boots, and her linen marked with a cross. Look and see if she warn't."

"Quite right."

"This is him as had a nasty cut over the eye. This is them two young sisters what tied themselves together with a handkercher. This is the drunken old chap, in a pair of list slippers and a nightcap, wot had offered—it afterwards come out—to make a hole in the water for a quartern of rum stood aforehand, and kept to his word for the first and last time in his life. They pretty well papers the room, you see; but I know 'em all. I'm scholar enough!"

He waved the light over the whole, as if to typify the light of his scholarly intelligence, and then put it down on the table and stood behind it looking intently at his visitors.

"Am I to show the way?"

As he opened the door, in pursuance of a nod from Lightwood, an extremely pale and disturbed face appeared in the doorway—the face of a man much agitated.

"A body missing?" asked Gaffer Hexam, stopping short; "or a body found? Which?"

"I am lost!" replied the man, in a hurried and an eager manner.

"Lost?"

"I—I—am a stranger, and don't know the way. I—I want to find the place where I can see what is described here. It is possible I may know it." He was panting, and could hardly speak; but he showed a copy of the newly-printed bill that was still wet upon the wall. Perhaps its newness, or perhaps the accuracy of his observations of its general look, guided Gaffer to a ready conclusion.

"This gentleman, Mr. Lightwood, is on that business."

"Mr. Lightwood?"

During a pause, Mortimer and the stranger confronted each other. Neither knew the other.

"I think, sir," said Mortimer, breaking the awkward silence with his airy self-possession, "that you did me the honor to mention my name?"

"I repeated it, after this man."

"You said you were a stranger in London?"

"An utter stranger."

"Are you seeking a Mr. Harmon?"

"No."

"Then I believe I can assure you that you are on a fruitless errand and will not find what you fear to find. Will you come with us?"

A little winding through some muddy alleys that might have been deposited by the last ill-savored tide, brought them to the wicket-gate and bright lamp of a Police Station; where they found the Night-Inspector.

"A bull's-eye," said the Night-Inspector, taking up his keys. "Now, gentlemen."

He opened a cool grot at the end of the yard, and they all went in. They quickly came out again, no one speaking but Eugene, who remarked to Mortimer, in a whisper, "*Not much worse than Lady Tippins.*"

"It appears to have knocked your friend over—knocked him completely off his legs," Mr. Inspector remarked, in a very low voice, and with a searching look (not the first he had cast) at the stranger.

Mr. Lightwood explained that it was no friend of his.

"Indeed?" said Mr. Inspector, with an attentive ear; "where did you pick him up?"

Mr. Lightwood explained further.

Mr. Inspector moved nothing but his eyes, as he now added, raising his voice:

"Turned you faint, sir! Seems you're not accustomed to this kind of work?"

The stranger, who was leaning against the chimneypiece with drooping head, looked round and answered, "No. It's a horrible sight!"

"You expected to identify, I am told, sir?"

"Yes."

"Have you identified?"

"No. It's a horrible sight. O! a horrible, horrible sight!"

"Who did you think it might have been?" asked Mr. Inspector. "Give us a description, sir. Perhaps we can help you."

"No, no," said the stranger; "It would be quite useless."

"You missed a friend, you know; or you missed a foe,

you know; or you wouldn't have come here, you know. Well, then; ain't it reasonable to ask, who was it?" Thus Mr. Inspector.

"You must excuse my telling you. No class of man can understand better than you, that families may not choose to publish their disagreements and misfortunes, except on the last necessity. I do not dispute that you discharge your duty in asking me the question; you will not dispute my right to withhold the answer."

"At least," said Mr. Inspector, "you will not object to leave me your card, sir?"

"I should not object, if I had one; but I have not." He reddened and was much confused as he gave the answer.

"At least," said Mr. Inspector, with no change of voice or manner, "you will not object to write down your name and address?"

"Not at all."

The stranger stepped up to the desk, and wrote in a rather tremulous hand—"Mr. Julius Handford, Exchequer Coffee House, Palace Yard, Westminster."

"Staying there, I presume, sir?"

"Staying there."

"Consequently from the country?"

"Eh? Yes—from the country."

"Good-night, sir."

"Reserve!" said Mr. Inspector. "Take care of this piece of paper, keep him in view without giving offense, ascertain that he is staying there, and find out anything you can about him."

There being nothing more to be done until the inquest was held next day, the friends went away together, and Gaffer Hexam and his son went their separate way. But Gaffer bade his boy go home, while he turned into a red-curtained tavern, the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters.

The boy found his sister again seated before the fire at her work, and asked:

"Where did you go, Liz?"

"I went out in the dark."

"There was no necessity for that. It was all right enough."

"One of the gentlemen, the one who didn't speak, looked hard at me. And I was afraid he might know what my face meant. But there! Don't mind me, Charley! I was all in a tremble of another sort when you owned to father you could write a little."

"Ah! But I made believe I wrote so badly as that it was odds if any one could read it. And when I wrote slowest, and smeared out with my finger most, father was best pleased, as he stood looking over me."

The girl put aside her work, and drawing her seat close to his seat by the fire, laid her arm gently on his shoulder.

"You'll make the most of your time, Charley; won't you?"

"Won't I? Come! I like that. Don't I?"

"Yes, Charley, yes. You work hard at your learning, I know. And I work a little, Charley, and plan and contrive a little (wake out of my sleep contriving, sometimes) how to get together a shilling now, and a shilling then, that shall make father believe you are beginning to earn a stray living alongshore."

At midday following the bird of prey reappeared at the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters, in the character, not new to him, of a witness before a coroner's jury.

Mr. Mortimer Lightwood, besides sustaining the character of one of the witnesses, doubled the part with that of the eminent solicitor who watched the proceedings on behalf of the representatives of the deceased, as was duly recorded in the newspapers. Mr. Inspector watched the proceedings too, and kept his watching closely to himself.

The jury found, That the body of Mr. John Harmon had been discovered floating in the Thames, in an advanced state of decay, and much injured; and that the said Mr. John Harmon had come by his death under highly suspicious circumstances, though by whose act or in what precise manner there was no evidence before this jury to show. And they appended to their verdict, a recommendation to the Home Office to offer a reward for the solution of the mystery. Within eight-and-forty hours, a reward of one hundred pounds was proclaimed, together with a free pardon to any person or persons not the actual perpetrator or perpetrators, and so forth in due form.

CHAPTER IV.

REGINALD WILFER is a name with rather a grand sound, suggesting on first acquaintance brasses in country churches, scrolls in stained-glass windows, and generally the De Wilfers who came over with the Conqueror. For it is a remarkable fact in genealogy that no De Any ones ever came over with anybody else.

But the Reginald Wilfer family were of such commonplace extraction and pursuits that their forefathers had for generations modestly subsisted on the Docks, the Excise Office, and the Custom House, and the existing R. Wilfer was a poor clerk. So poor a clerk, through having a limited salary and an unlimited family, that he had never yet attained the modest object of his ambition: which was, to wear a complete new suit of clothes at one time.

If the conventional Cherub could ever grow up and be clothed, he might be photographed as a portrait of Wilfer.

He was clerk in the drug-house of Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles. Chicksey and Stobbles, his former masters, had both become absorbed in Veneering, once their traveler or commission agent.

R. Wilfer locked up his desk one evening, and, putting his bunch of keys in his pocket much as if it were his pegtop, made for home.

Mrs. Wilfer was, of course, a tall woman and an angular. Her lord being cherubic, she was necessarily majestic, according to the principle which matrimonially unites contrasts. She was much given to tying up her head in a pocket-handkerchief, knotted under the chin. This headgear, in conjunction with a pair of gloves worn within doors, she seemed to consider as at once a kind of armor against misfortune (invariably assuming it when in low spirits or difficulties), and as a species of full dress. It was therefore with some sinking of the spirit that her husband beheld her thus heroically attired, putting down her candle in the little hall, and coming down the door-steps through the little front court to open the gate for him.

Something had gone wrong with the house-door, for R. Wilfer stopped on the steps, staring at it, and cried:

"Hal—loa!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Wilfer, "the man came himself with a pair of pincers, and took it off, and took it away. He said that he had no expectation of ever being paid for it, and as he had an order for another LADIES' SCHOOL door-plate, it was better (burnished up) for the interests of all parties."

"Perhaps it was, my dear; what do you think?"

"You are master here, R. W.," returned his wife. "It is as you think; not as I do. Perhaps it might have been better if the man had taken the door too."

"My dear, we couldn't have done without the door."

"Couldn't we?"

"Why, my dear! Could we?"

"It is as you think, R. W.; not as I do." With those submissive words, the dutiful wife preceded him down a few stairs to a little basement front room, half kitchen, half parlor, where a girl of about nineteen, with an exceedingly pretty figure and face, but with an impatient and petulant expression both in her face and in her shoulders, sat playing draughts with a younger girl, who was the youngest of the House of Wilfer. Not to encumber this page by telling off the Wilfers in detail and casting them up in the gross, it is enough that the rest were what is called "out in the world," in various ways, and that they were Many.

"Well Piggywiggies," said R. W., "how de do to-night? What I was thinking of, my dear," to Mrs. Wilfer already seated in a corner with folded gloves, "was, that as we have let our first floor so well, and as we have now no place in which you could teach pupils, even if pupils—"

"The milkman said he knew of two young ladies of the highest respectability who were in search of a suitable establishment, and he took a card," interposed Mrs. Wilfer, with severe monotony. "Tell your father whether it was last Monday, Bella."

"But we never heard any more of it, ma," said Bella, the elder girl.

"In addition to which, my dear," her husband urged, "if you have no place to put two young persons into—"

"Pardon me," Mrs. Wilfer again interposed; "they were not young persons. Two young ladies of the highest re-

spectability. Tell your father, Bella, whether the milkman said so."

"My dear, it is the same thing."

"No it is not," said Mrs. Wilfer. "Pardon me!"

"I mean, my dear, it is the same thing as to space. As to space. If you have no space in which to put two youthful fellow-creatures, however eminently respectable, which I do not doubt, where are those youthful fellow-creatures to be accommodated? I carry it no further than that."

"I have nothing more to say," returned Mrs. Wilfer. "It is as you think, R. W.; not as I do."

Here the huffing of Miss Bella and the loss of three of her men at a swoop, aggravated by the coronation of an opponent, led to that young lady's jerking the draught-board and pieces off the table: which her sister went down on her knees to pick up.

"Poor Bella!" said Mrs. Wilfer.

"And poor Lavinia, perhaps, my dear?" suggested R. W.

"Pardon me," said Mrs. Wilfer, "no! Lavinia has not known the trial that Bella has known. The trial that your daughter Bella has undergone, is, perhaps, without a parallel, and has been borne, I will say, nobly. When you see your daughter Bella in her black dress, which she alone of all the family wears, and when you remember the circumstances which have led to her wearing it, and when you know how those circumstances have been sustained, then, R. W., lay your head upon your pillow and say, 'poor Lavinia!'"

Bella, who was now seated on the rug to warm herself, with her brown eyes on the fire and a handful of her brown curls in her mouth, laughed at this, and then pouted and half cried.

"I am sure," said she, "though you have no feeling for me, pa, I am one of the most unfortunate girls that ever lived. You know how poor we are," (it is probable he did, having some reason to know it!) "and what a glimpse of wealth I had, and how it melted away, and how I am here in this ridiculous mourning—which I hate!—a kind of a widow who never was married. And yet you don't feel for me.—Yes you do, yes you do."

This abrupt change was occasioned by her father's face.

She stopped to pull him down from his chair in an attitude highly favorable to strangulation, and to give him a kiss and a pat or two on the cheek.

"But you ought to feel for me, you know, pa."

"My dear, I do."

"Yes, I say you ought to. If they had only left me alone and told me nothing about it, it would have mattered much less. But that nasty Mr. Lightfoot feels it his duty, as he says, to write and tell me what is in reserve for me, and then I am obliged to get rid of George Sampson."

Here Lavinia, rising to the surface with the last draughtman rescued, interposed, "You never cared for George Sampson, Bella."

"And did I say I did, miss?" Then pouting again, with the curls in her mouth: "George Sampson was very fond of me, and admired me very much, and put up with everything I did to him."

"You were rude enough to him," Lavinia again interposed.

"And did I say I wasn't, miss? I am not setting up to be sentimental about George Sampson. I only say George Sampson was better than nothing."

Then, whimpering again, and at intervals biting the curls, and stopping to look how much was bitten off, "It's a shame! There never was such a hard case! I shouldn't care so much if it wasn't so ridiculous. It was ridiculous enough to have a stranger coming over to marry me, whether he liked it or not. It was ridiculous enough to know what an embarrassing meeting it would be, and how we never could pretend to have an inclination of our own, either of us. It was ridiculous enough to know I shouldn't like him—how *could* I like him, left to him in a will, like a dozen of spoons, with everything cut and dried beforehand, like orange chips. Talk of orange flowers indeed! I declare again it's a shame! Those ridiculous points would have been smoothed away by the money, for I love money, and want money—want it dreadfully. I hate to be poor, and we are degradingly poor, offensively poor, miserably poor, beastly poor. But here I am, left with all the ridiculous parts of the situation remaining, and, added to them all, this ridiculous dress!"

The young lady's lamentations were checked at this point by a knuckle, knocking at the half-open door of the room. The knuckle had knocked two or three times already, but had not been heard.

"Who is it?" said Mrs. Wilfer, in her Act-of-Parliament manner. "Enter!"

A gentleman coming in, Miss Bella, with a short and sharp exclamation, scrambled off the hearth-rug and massed the bitten curls together in their right place on her neck.

"The servant girl had her key in the door as I came up, and directed me to this room, telling me I was expected. I am afraid I should have asked her to announce me."

"Pardon me," returned Mrs. Wilfer. "Not at all. Two of my daughters. R. W., this is the gentleman who has taken your first floor. He was so good as to make an appointment for to-night, when you would be at home."

A dark gentleman. Thirty at the utmost. An expressive, one might say handsome, face. A very bad manner. In the last degree constrained, reserved, diffident, troubled. His eyes were on Miss Bella for an instant, and then looked at the ground as he addressed the master of the house.

"Seeing that I am quite satisfied, Mr. Wilfer, with the rooms, and with their situation, and with their price, I suppose a memorandum between us of two or three lines, and a payment down, will bind the bargain? I wish to send in furniture without delay."

"Shall I mention, sir," insinuated the landlord, expecting it to be received as a matter of course, "the form of a reference?"

"I think," returned the gentleman, after a pause, "that a reference is not necessary; neither, to say the truth, is it convenient, for I am a stranger in London. I require no reference from you, and perhaps, therefore, you will require none from me. That will be fair on both sides. Indeed, I show the greater confidence of the two, for I will pay in advance whatever you please, and I am going to trust my furniture here."

"Well!" observed R. Wilfer, cheerfully, "money and goods are certainly the best of references."

"Do you think they *are* the best, pa?" asked Miss Bella,

in a low voice, and without looking over the shoulder as she warmed her foot on the fender.

"Among the best, my dear."

"I should have thought, myself, it was so easy to add the usual kind of one," said Bella, with a toss of her curls.

The gentleman listened to her, with a face of marked attention, though he neither looked up nor changed his attitude.

When the agreement was ready in duplicate it was signed by the contracting parties, R. Wilfer, and John Rokesmith, Esquire.

When it came to Bella's turn to sign her name as witness, Mr. Rokesmith, who was standing, as he had sat, with a hesitating hand upon the table, looked at her stealthily, but narrowly. He looked at the pretty figure bending down over the paper and saying, "Where am I to go, pa? Here, in this corner?" He looked at the beautiful brown hair, shading the coquettish face; he looked at the free dash of the signature, which was a bold one for a woman's; and then they looked at one another.

"Much obliged to you, Miss Wilfer."

"Obliged?"

"I have given you so much trouble."

"Signing my name? Yes, certainly. But I am your landlord's daughter, sir."

As there was nothing more to do but pay eight sovereigns in earnest of the bargain, pocket the agreement, appoint a time for the arrival of his furniture and himself, and go, Mr. Rokesmith did that as awkwardly as it might be done, and was escorted by his landlord to the outer air. When R. Wilfer returned, candlestick in hand, to the bosom of his family, he found the bosom agitated.

"Pa," said Bella, "we have got a Murderer for a tenant."

"Pa," said Lavinia, "we have got a Robber."

"To see him for his life unable to look anybody in the face!" said Bella. "There never was such an exhibition."

"My dears," said their father, "he is a diffident gentleman, and I should say particularly so in the society of girls of your age."

"Nonsense, our age!" cried Bella, impatiently. "What's that got to do with him?"

"Besides, we are not of the same age:—which age?" demanded Lavinia.

"Never *you* mind, Lavvy," retorted Bella; "you wait till you are of an age to ask such questions. Pa, mark my words! Between Mr. Rokesmith and me there is a natural antipathy and a deep distrust; and something will come of it!"

"My dear, and girls," said the cherub-patriarch, "between Mr. Rokesmith and me there is a matter of eight sovereigns, and something for supper shall come of it, if you'll agree upon the article."

"Pa," said Bella, "when old Mr. Harmon made such a fool of me (not to mention himself, as he is dead), what do you suppose he did it for?"

"Impossible to say, my dear. As I have told you times out of number since his will was brought to light, I doubt if I ever exchanged a hundred words with the old gentleman. If it was his whim to surprise us, his whim succeeded. For he certainly did it."

On going to bed, Bella continued her moan: Nothing to go out in, nothing to dress by, only a nasty box to dress at instead of a commodious dressing-table, and being obliged to take in suspicious lodgers. On the last grievance as her climax, she laid great stress—and might have laid greater, had she known that if Mr. Julius Handford had a twin brother upon earth, Mr. John Rokesmith was the man.

CHAPTER V.

OVER against a London house, a corner house not far from Cavendish Square, a man with a wooden leg had sat for some years, with his remaining foot in a basket in cold weather, picking up a living in this wise:—Every morning at eight o'clock, he stumped to the corner, carrying a chair, a clothes-horse, a pair of trestles, a board, a basket, and an umbrella, all strapped together. Separating these, the board and trestles became a counter, the basket supplied the few small lots of fruit and sweets that he offered for sale upon it, and became a foot warmer, the unfolded clothes-horse displayed a choice collection of halfpenny ballads and

became a screen, and the stool planted within it became his post for the rest of the day. All weathers saw the man at the post. This is to be accepted in a double sense, for he contrived a back to his wooden stool, by placing it against the lamp-post. When the weather was wet, he put up his umbrella over his stock in trade, not over himself; when the weather was dry, he furled that faded article, tied it round with a piece of yarn, and laid it cross-wise under the trestles; where it looked like an unwholesomely-forced lettuce that had lost in color and crispness what it had gained in size.

On the front of his sale-board hung a little placard, like a kettle-holder, bearing the inscription in his own small text:

*Errands gone
On With fi
Delity By
Ladies and Gentlemen
I remain
Your humble Servt :
Silas Wegg.*

He had not only settled it with himself in course of time that he was errand-goer by appointment to the house at the corner (though he received such commissions not half a dozen times in a year, and then only as some servant's deputy), but also that he was one of the house's retainers, and owed vassalage to it, and was bound to leal and loyal interest in it. For this reason, he always spoke of it as "Our House," and, though his knowledge of its affairs was mostly speculative and all wrong, claimed to be in its confidence. On similar grounds he never beheld an inmate at any one of its windows but he touched his hat. Yet, he knew so little about the inmates, that he gave them names of his own invention: as "Miss Elizabeth," "Master George," "Aunt Jane," "Uncle Parker"—having no authority whatever for any such designations, but particularly the last—to which, as a natural consequence, he stuck with great obstinacy.

The only article in which Silas dealt that was not hard, was gingerbread. On a certain day, some wretched infant having purchased the damp gingerbread-horse (fearfully out of condition), and the adhesive bird-cage, which had been exposed for the day's sale, he had taken a tin box from under his stool to produce a relay of those dreadful specimens, and was going to look in at the lid, when he said to himself, pausing: "Oh! Here you are again!"

The words referred to a broad, round-shouldered, one-sided old fellow in mourning, comically ambling towards the corner, dressed in a pea overcoat, and carrying a large stick. He wore thick shoes, and thick leather gaiters, and thick gloves like a hedger's. Both as to his dress and to himself, he was of an overlapping rhinoceros build, with folds in his cheeks, and his forehead, and his eyelids, and his lips, and his ears; but with bright, eager, childishy-inquiring, gray eyes, under his ragged eyebrows and broad-brimmed hat. A very odd-looking old fellow altogether.

"Here you are again," repeated Mr. Wegg, musing. "And what are you now? Are you in the Funds, or where are you? Have you lately come to settle in this neighborhood, or do you own to another neighborhood? Are you in independent circumstances, or is it wasting the motions of a bow on you? Come! I'll speculate! I'll invest a bow in you."

The salute was acknowledged with:

"Morning, sir! Morning! Morning!"

("Calls me Sir!" said Mr. Wegg, to himself. "*He won't answer. A bow gone!*")

"Morning, morning, morning!"

"Appears to be rather a 'arty old cock too," said Mr. Wegg, as before. "Good-morning to *you*, sir."

"Do you remember me, then?"

"I have noticed you go past our house, sir, several times in the course of the last week or so."

"Our house," repeated the other. "Meaning—?"

"Yes," said Mr. Wegg.

"Oh! Now, what," pursued the old fellow, in an inquisitive manner, "what do they allow you now?"

"It's job work that I do for our house," returned Silas,

dryly, and with reticence; "it's not yet brought to an exact allowance."

"Oh! It's not yet brought to an exact allowance? No! It's not yet brought to an exact allowance. Oh!—Morning, morning, morning!"

"Appears to be rather a cracked old cock," thought Silas, qualifying his former good opinion, as the other ambled off. But in a moment he was back again with the question:

"How did you get your wooden leg?"

Mr. Wegg replied, tartly, "In an accident."

"Do you like it?"

"Well! I haven't got to keep it warm," Mr. Wegg made answer.

"He hasn't," repeated the other to his knotted stick, as he gave it a hug; "he hasn't got—ha!—ha!—to keep it warm! Did you ever hear of the name of Boffin?"

"No," said Mr. Wegg, "I never did hear of the name of Boffin."

"Do you like it?"

"Why, no," retorted Mr. Wegg, "I can't say I do."

"Why don't you like it?"

"I don't know why I don't," retorted Mr. Wegg, approaching frenzy, "but I don't at all."

"Now, I'll tell you something that'll make you sorry for that," said the stranger, smiling. "My name's Boffin."

"I can't help it!" returned Mr. Wegg.

"But there's another chance for you," said Mr. Boffin, smiling still, "Do you like the name of Nicodemus? Think it over. Nick, or Noddy."

"It is not, sir," Mr. Wegg rejoined, "it is not a name as I could wish any one that I had a respect for to call *me* by."

"Noddy Boffin," said that gentleman. "Noddy. That's my name. Noddy—or Nick—Boffin. What's your name?"

"Silas Wegg. I don't know why Silas, and I don't know why Wegg."

"Now, Wegg," said Mr. Boffin, hugging his stick closer, "I want to make a sort of offer to you. Do you remember when you first see me?"

The wooden Wegg looked at him with a meditative eye,

and also with a softened air as descrying possibility of profit. "Let me think. I ain't quite sure, and yet I generally take a powerful sight of notice, too. Was it on a Monday morning, when the butcher-boy had been to our house for orders, and bought a ballad of me, which, being unacquainted with the tune, I run it over to him?"

"Right, Wegg, right! But he bought more than one."

"Yes, to be sure, sir; he bought several; and wishing to lay out his money to the best, he took my opinion to guide his choice, and we went over the collection together. To be sure we did."

"What do you think I was doing, Wegg? I was a listening. Not in a dishonorable way, Wegg, because you was singing to the butcher; and you wouldn't sing secrets to a butcher in the street, you know."

"It never happened that I did so yet, to the best of my remembrance," said Mr. Wegg, cautiously.

"You haven't got another stool, have you? I'm rather thick in my breath."

"I haven't got another, but you're welcome to this," said Wegg, resigning it. "It's a treat to me to stand."

"Well," repeated Boffin, "I was a listening to you with hadmiration amounting to haw. I thought to myself, 'Here's a man with a wooden leg—a literary man with—'"

"N—not exactly so, sir," said Mr. Wegg.

"Why, you know every one of these songs by name and by tune, and if you want to read or to sing any one on 'em off straight, you've only to whip on your spectacles and do it!" cried Mr. Boffin. "I see you at it!"

"Well, sir," returned Mr. Wegg, with a conscious inclination of the head; "we'll say literary, then."

"'A literary man—with a wooden leg—and all Print is open to him!' And it is, ain't it?"

"Why, truly, sir," Mr. Wegg admitted, with modesty; "I believe you couldn't show me the piece of English print that I wouldn't be equal to collaring and throwing."

"On the spot?" said Mr. Boffin.

"On the spot."

"I know'd it! Then consider this. Here am I, a man without a wooden leg, and yet all print is shut to me."

"Indeed, sir?" Mr. Wegg returned with increasing self-complacency. "Education neglected?"

"Neg-lected!" repeated Boffin, with emphasis. "That ain't no word for it. I don't mean to say but what if you showed me a B, I could so far give you change for it, as to answer Boffin. Now, look here. I'm retired from business. Me and Mrs. Boffin—Henerietty Boffin—which her father's name was Henery, and her mother's name was Hetty, and so you get it—we live on a compittance, under the will of a diseased governor."

"Gentleman dead, sir?"

"Man alive, don't I tell you? A diseased governor? Now, it's too late for me to begin shoveling and sifting at alphabeds and grammar-books. But I want some reading—some fine bold reading, some splendid book in a gorging Lord-Mayor's-Show of wollumes, as'll reach right down your pint of view, and take time to go by you. How can I get that reading, Wegg? By paying a man truly qualified to do it, so much an hour (say twopence) to come and do it."

"Hem! Flattered, sir, I am sure," said Wegg, beginning to regard himself quite in a new light. "Hem! This is the offer you mentioned, sir?"

"Yes. Do you like it?"

"I am considering of it, Mr Boffin."

"I don't," said Boffin, in a free-handed manner, "want to tie a literary man—with a wooden leg—down too tight. A halfpenny an hour shan't part us. The hours are your own to choose, after you've done for the day with your house here. I live over Maiden-Lane way—out Holloway direction—and you've only got to go East-and-by-North when you've finished here, and you're there. Twopence halfpenny an hour," said Boffin, taking a piece of chalk from his pocket and getting off the stool to work the sum on the top of it in his own way; "two long'uns and a short'un—twopence halfpenny; two short'uns is a long'un and two two long'uns is four long'uns—making five long'uns; six nights a week at five long'uns a night," scoring them all down separately, "and you mount up to thirty long'uns. A round'un! Half a crown!"

"Half a crown," said Wegg, meditating. "Yes. (It ain't much, sir.) Half-a-crown."

"Per week, you know."

"Per week. Yes. As to the amount of strain upon the intellect now. Was you thinking at all of Poetry?" Mr. Wegg inquired, musing.

"Would it come dearer?" Mr. Boffin asked.

"It would come dearer," Mr. Wegg returned. "For when a person comes to grind off poetry night after night, it is but right he should expect to be paid for its weakening effect on his mind."

"To tell you the truth, Wegg," said Boffin, "I wasn't thinking of poetry, except in so far as this:—If you was to happen now and then to feel yourself in the mind to tip me and Mrs. Boffin one of your ballads, why then we should drop into poetry."

"I follow you, sir," said Wegg. "But not being a regular musical professional, I should be loath to engage myself for that; and therefore when I dropped into poetry, I should ask to be considered, so fur, in the light of a friend."

At this, Mr. Boffin's eyes sparkled, and he shook Silas earnestly by the hand.

"What do you think of the terms, Wegg?"

"Mr. Boffin, I never bargain."

"So I should have thought of you!" said Mr. Boffin, admiringly.

"No, sir. I never did 'aggle and I never will 'aggle. Consequently I meet you at once, free and fair, with—Done, for double the money!"

Mr. Boffin seemed a little unprepared for this conclusion, but assented, with the remark, "You know better what it ought to be than I do, Wegg," and again shook hands with him upon it.

"Could you begin to-night, Wegg?" he then demanded.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Wegg, careful to leave all the eagerness to him. "I see no difficulty if you wish it. You are provided with the needful implement—a book, sir?"

"Bought him at a sale," said Mr. Boffin. "Eight wolumes. Red and gold. Purple ribbon in every wollume, to keep the place where you leave off. Do you know him?"

"The book's name, sir?" inquired Silas.

"I thought you might have know'd him without it," said

Mr. Boffin, slightly disappointed. "His name is Decline-And-Fall-Off-The-Rooshan-Empire."

"Ay, indeed! I haven't been not to say right slap through him, very lately," Mr. Wegg made answer, "having been otherways employed, Mr. Boffin. But know him? Old familiar declining and falling off the Rooshan? Rather, sir! Ever since I was not so high as your stick. Ever since my eldest brother left our cottage to enlist into the army. On which occasion, as the ballad that was made about it describes:

"Beside that cottage door, Mr. Boffin,
A girl was on her knees;
She held aloft a snowy scarf, Sir,
Which (my eldest brother noticed) fluttered in the breeze.
She breathed a prayer for him, Mr. Boffin;
A prayer he could not hear.
And my eldest brother lean'd upon his sword, Mr. Boffin,
And wiped away a tear."

Much impressed by this family circumstance, and also by the friendly disposition of Mr. Wegg, as exemplified in his so soon dropping into poetry, Mr. Boffin again shook hands with that ligneous sharper, and besought him to name his hour. Mr. Wegg named eight.

"Where I live," said Mr. Boffin, "is called The Bower. Boffin's Bower is the name Mrs. Boffin christened it when we come into it as a property. If you should meet with anybody that don't know it by that name (which hardly anybody does), when you've got nigh upon about a odd mile, or say and a quarter if you like, up Maiden Lane, Battle Bridge, ask for Harmony Jail, and you'll be put right. My fist again, Wegg. Morning, morning, morning!"

When night came, her veiled eyes beheld stumping towards Boffin's Bower Mr. Wegg.

Pushing the gate, which stood ajar, Wegg looked into an enclosed space where certain tall dark mounds rose high against the sky, and where the pathway to the Bower was indicated between two lines of broken crockery set in ashes. A white figure advancing along this path, proved to be nothing more ghostly than Mr. Boffin, easily attired for the pursuit of knowledge, in an undress garment of short white

smock-frock. He conducted his literary friend to the interior of the Bower, and there presented him to Mrs. Boffin, a stout lady of a rubicund and cheerful aspect, in a low evening-dress of sable satin, and a large black velvet hat and feathers.

"Mrs. Boffin, Wegg," said Boffin, "is a highflyer at Fashion. And her make is such, that she does it credit. As to myself, I ain't yet as Fash'nable as I may come to be. Henrietty, old lady, this is the gentleman that's a going to decline and fall off the Rooshan Empire."

"And I am sure I hope it'll do you both good," said Mrs. Boffin.

There were two wooden settles by the fire, one on either side of it, with a corresponding table before each. On one of these tables the eight volumes were ranged flat, in a row, like a galvanic battery; on the other, certain squat case-bottles of inviting appearance seemed to stand on tiptoe to exchange glances with Mr. Wegg over a front row of tumblers and a basin of white sugar. On the hob, a kettle steamed; on the hearth, a cat reposed. Facing the fire between the settles, a sofa, a footstool, and a little table, formed a centre-piece devoted to Mrs. Boffin. They were garish in taste and color, but were expensive articles of drawing-room furniture, that had a very odd look beside the settles and the flaring gaslight pendent from the ceiling. There was a flowery carpet on the floor; but, instead of reaching to the fireside, its glowing vegetation stopped short at Mrs. Boffin's footstool, and gave place to a region of sand and sawdust. Mr. Wegg also noticed, with admiring eyes, that, while the flowery land displayed such hollow ornamentation as stuffed birds and waxen fruits under glass-shades, there were, in the territory where vegetation ceased, compensatory shelves on which the best part of a large pie and likewise of a cold joint were plainly discernible among other solids. The room itself was large, though low; and the heavy frames of its old-fashioned windows, and the heavy beams in its crooked ceiling, seemed to indicate that it had once been a house of some mark standing alone in the country.

"Do you like it, Wegg?" asked Mr. Boffin, in his pouncing manner.

"I admire it greatly, sir," said Wegg. "Peculiar comfort at this fireside, sir."

"Do you understand it, Wegg?"

"Why, in a general way, sir," Mr. Wegg was beginning slowly and knowingly, with his head stuck on one side, as evasive people do begin, when the other cut him short:

"You *don't* understand it, Wegg, and I'll explain it. These arrangements is made by mutual consent between Mrs. Boffin and me. Mrs. Boffin, as I've mentioned, is a highflyer at Fashion; at present I'm not. I don't go higher than comfort, and comfort of the sort that I'm equal to the enjoyment of. Well then. Where would be the good of Mrs. Boffin and me quarreling over it? We never did quarrel, before we come into Boffin's Bower as a property: why quarrel when we *have* come into Boffin's Bower as a property? So Mrs. Boffin, she keeps up her part of the room, in her way; I keep up my part of the room in mine. In consequence of which we have at once, Sociability (I should go melancholy mad without Mrs. Boffin), Fashion, and Comfort. If I get by degrees to be a highflyer at Fashion, then Mrs. Boffin will by degrees come for'arder. If Mrs. Boffin should ever be less of a dab at Fashion than she is at the present time, then Mrs. Boffin's carpet would go back'arder. If we should both continny as we are, why then *here* we are, and give us a kiss, old lady. Now, what'll you read on?"

"Thank you, sir," returned Wegg, as if there were nothing new in his reading at all. "I generally do it on gin and water."

Mrs. Boffin's Fashion, as a less inexorable deity than the idol usually worshiped under that name, did not forbid her mixing for her literary guest, or asking if he found the result to his liking. Mr. Boffin began to compose himself as a listener, with exultant eyes.

"Sorry to deprive you of a pipe, Wegg," he said, filling his own, "but you can't do both together. Oh! and another thing I forgot to name! When you come in here of an evening, and look round you, and notice anything on a shelf that happens to catch your fancy, mention it."

Wegg, who had been going to put on his spectacles, immediately laid them down, with the sprightly observation:

"You read my thoughts, sir. *Do my eyes deceive me, or is that object up there a—pie? It can't be a pie.*"

"Yes, it's a pie, Wegg," replied Mr. Boffin, with a glance of some little discomfiture at the *Decline and Fall*.

The pie was brought down, and the worthy Mr. Boffin exercised his patience until Wegg had finished the dish, pushed away his plate, and put on his spectacles. Mr. Boffin lighted his pipe and looked with beaming eyes into the opening world before him, and Mrs. Boffin reclined in a fashionable manner on her sofa: as one who would be part of the audience if she found she could, and would go to sleep if she found she couldn't.

"Hem!" began Wegg, "This, Mr. Boffin and Lady, is the first chapter of the first wollume of the *Decline and Fall* off—" here he looked hard at the book, and stopped.

"What's the matter, Wegg?"

"Why, it comes into my mind, do you know, sir," said Wegg, with an air of insinuating frankness, "that you made a little mistake this morning, which I had meant to set you right in, only something put it out of my head. I think you said *Rooshan Empire*, sir?"

"It is *Rooshan*; ain't it, Wegg?"

"No, sir. *Roman. Roman.*"

"What's the difference, Wegg?"

"The difference, sir?" Mr. Wegg was faltering and in danger of breaking down, when a bright thought flashed upon him. "The difference, sir? There you place me in a difficulty, Mr. Boffin. Suffice it to observe, that the difference is best postponed to some other occasion when Mrs. Boffin does not honor us with her company. In Mrs. Boffin's presence, sir, we had better drop it."

Then Mr. Wegg entered on his task; going straight across country at everything that came before him; taking all the hard words, biographical and geographical; getting rather shaken by Hadrian, Trajan, and the Antonines; stumbling at Polybius (pronounced Polly Beeious, and supposed by Mr. Boffin to be a Roman virgin, and by Mrs. Boffin to be responsible for that necessity of dropping it); heavily unseated by Titus Antoninus Pius; up again and galloping smoothly with Augustus; finally getting over the ground

well with Commodus; who, under the appellation of Commodious, was held by Mr. Boffin to have been quite unworthy of his English origin, and "not to have acted up to his name" in his government of the Roman people. With the death of this personage, Mr. Wegg terminated his first reading, long before which consummation several total eclipses of Mrs. Boffin's candle behind her black velvet disc would have been very alarming, but for being regularly accompanied by a potent smell of burnt pens when her feathers took fire, which acted as a restorative and woke her. Mr. Wegg, having read on by rote and attached as few ideas as possible to the text, came out of the encounter fresh; but Mr. Boffin, who had soon laid down his unfinished pipe, and had ever since sat intently staring with his eyes and mind at the confounding enormities of the Romans, was so severely punished that he could hardly wish his literary friend Good-night, and articulate "To-morrow."

"Commodious," gasped Mr. Boffin, staring at the moon, after letting Wegg out at the gate and fastening it: "Commodious fights in that wild-beast show, seven hundred and thirty-five times, in one character only! As if that wasn't stunning enough, a hundred lions is turned into the same wild-beast show all at once! As if that wasn't stunning enough, Commodious, in another character, kills 'em all off in a hundred goes! As if that wasn't stunning enough, Vittle-us, (and well named too) eats six millions' worth, English money, in seven months! Wegg takes it easy, but upon my soul, to a old bird like myself these are scarers. And even now that Commodious is strangled, I don't see a way to our bettering ourselves." Mr. Boffin added as he turned his pensive steps towards the Bower and shook his head, "I didn't think this morning there was half so many Scarers in Print. But I'm in for it now!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters, already mentioned as a tavern of a dropsical appearance, had long settled down into a state of hale infirmity.

Miss Potterson, sole proprietor and manager of the Fel-

lowship-Porters, reigned supreme on her throne, the Bar, and a man must have drunk himself mad drunk indeed if he thought he could contest a point with her.

"Now, you mind, you Riderhood," said Miss Abbey Potterson, with emphatic forefinger over the half-door, "the Fellowships don't want you at all, and would rather by far have your room than your company."

"You're cruel hard upon me, Miss Potterson."

Miss Potterson read her newspaper with contracted brows, and took no notice until he whispered:

"Miss Potterson! Ma'am! Might I have half a word with you?"

"Well?" said Miss Potterson, with a manner as short as she herself was long, "say your half word. Bring it out."

"Miss Potterson! Ma'am! Would you 'sxcuse me taking the liberty of asking, is it my character that you take objections to?"

"Certainly," said Miss Potterson.

"Might you have any apprehensions—leastway beliefs or suppositions—that the company's property mightn't be altogether to be considered safe, if I used the house too regular?"

"What do you want to know for?"

"Well, Miss Abbey, respectfully meaning no offense to you, it would be some satisfaction to a man's mind, to understand why the Fellowship-Porters is not to be free to such as me, and is to be free to such as Gaffer."

The face of the hostess darkened with some shadow of perplexity, as she replied: "Gaffer has never been where you have been."

"Signifying in Quod, Miss? Perhaps not. But he may have merited it. He may be suspected of far worse than ever I was."

"Who suspects him?"

"Many, perhaps. One, beyond all doubts. I do."

"You are not much."

"But I was his pardner. I am the man that was his pardner, and I am the man that suspects him."

"Then," suggested Miss Abbey, though with a deeper shade of perplexity than before, "you criminate yourself."

"No, I don't, Miss Abbey. For how does it stand? It stands this way. When I was his pardner, I couldn't never give him satisfaction. Why couldn't I never give him satisfaction? Because my luck was bad; because I couldn't find many enough of 'em. How was his luck? Always good. Notice this! Always good! Ah! There's a many games, Miss Abbey, in which there's chance, but there's a many others in which there's skill too, mixed along with it."

"That Gaffer has a skill in finding what he finds, who doubts, man?" asked Miss Abbey.

"A skill in purwiding what he finds, perhaps," said Riderhood, shaking his evil head.

"I say so, Miss Abbey! And mind you! I'll follow him up, Miss Abbey! And mind you! I'll bring him to book at last, if it's twenty year hence, I will! Who's he, to be favored along of his daughter? Ain't I got a daughter of my own?"

With that flourish, Mr. Riderhood swaggered off to the tap-room.

"You Bob Glibbery," said Miss Abbey to her pot-boy, "run round to Hexam's, and tell his daughter Lizzie that I want to speak to her."

"Lizzie Hexam, Lizzie Hexam," began Miss Potterson, "how often have I held out to you the opportunity of getting clear of your father, and doing well?"

"Very often, Miss."

"Very often? Yes! And I might as well have spoken to the iron funnel of the strongest sea-going steamer that passes the Fellowship-Porters."

"No, Miss," Lizzie pleaded; "because that would not be thankful, and I am."

"Lizzie Hexam, Lizzie Hexam, think again. Do you know the worst of your father?"

"Do I know the worst of father!" she repeated, opening her eyes.

"Do you know the suspicions to which your father makes himself liable? Do you know the suspicions that are actually about, against him?"

The consciousness of what he habitually did, oppressed the girl heavily, and she slowly cast down her eyes.

"Please to tell me what the suspicions are, Miss—"

"It's not an easy thing to tell a daughter, but it must be told. It is thought by some, then, that your father helps to their death a few of those that he finds dead."

The relief of hearing what she felt sure was a false suspicion, in place of the expected real and true one, so lightened Lizzie's breast for the moment, that Miss Abbey was amazed at her demeanor. She raised her eyes quickly, shook her head, and, in a kind of triumph, almost laughed.

"They little know father who talk like that! And perhaps it is some one who has a grudge against father; some one who has threatened father. Is it Riderhood, Miss?"

"Well; yes, it is."

"Yes! He was father's partner, and father broke with him, and now he revenges himself. And besides, Miss Abbey!—Will you never, without strong reason, let pass your lips what I am going to say?"

She bent forward to say it in a whisper.

"I promise," said Miss Abbey.

"It was on the night when the Harmon murder was found out, through father, just above bridge. And just below bridge, as we were sculling home, Riderhood crept out of the dark in his boat. And many and many times afterwards, when such great pains were taken to come to the bottom of the crime, and it never could be come near, I thought in my own thoughts, could Riderhood himself have done the murder, and did he purposely let father find the body? It seemed almost wicked and cruel to so much as think such a thing; but now that he tries to throw it upon father, I go back to it as if it was a truth. Can it be a truth, that was put into mind by the dead?"

"You poor deluded girl," said Miss Potterson, "don't you see that you can't open your mind to particular suspicions of one of the two, without opening your mind to general suspicions of the other? Lizzie, leave him. You needn't break with him altogether, but leave him. Do well away from him; come under my direction. Don't fling yourself away, my girl, but be persuaded into being respectable and happy."

In the sound good feeling and good sense of her entreaty, Miss Abbey had softened into a soothing tone, and had even

drawn her arm around the girl's waist. But she only replied, "Thank you, thank you! I can't. I won't. I must not think of it. The harder father is borne upon, the more he needs me to lean on."

And then Miss Abbey became frigid.

"I have done what I can," she said, "and you must go your way. But tell your father one thing: he must not come here any more."

"Oh, Miss, will you forbid him the house where I know he's safe?"

"The Fellowships," returned Miss Abbey, "has itself to look to, as well as others. I forbid the house to Riderhood, and I forbid the house to Gaffer. They are both tarred with a dirty brush, and I can't have the Fellowships tarred with the same brush. That's all I know."

"Good-night, Miss!" said Lizzie Hexam, sorrowfully.

"Hah!—Good-night!" returned Miss Abbey with a shake of her head.

"Believe me, Miss Abbey, I am truly grateful all the same."

"I can believe a good deal," returned the stately Abbey, "so I'll try to believe that too, Lizzie."

One thing only was clear to the girl's mind, as she ran home.

The room was quiet, and the lamp burned on the table. In the bunk in the corner her brother lay asleep. She bent over him softly, kissed him, and came to the table.

Very quietly, she placed a chair before the scanty fire, and sat down in it, drawing her shawl about her.

The clock struck two, three, four, and she remained there, with a woman's patience and her own purpose. Between four and five, she slipped off her shoes, trimmed the fire sparingly, put water on to boil, and set the table for breakfast. Then she went up the ladder, lamp in hand, and came down again, and glided about and about, making a little bundle. Lastly, from her pocket, and from the chimneypiece, and from an inverted basin on the highest shelf, she brought halfpence, a few sixpences, fewer shillings, and fell to laboriously and noiselessly counting them, and setting aside one little heap. She was still so engaged, when her brother awoke.

The boy completed his dressing, and came and sat down at the little breakfast-table.

"Charley dear, I have made up my mind that this is the right time for your going away from us. You must leave father to me, Charley—I will do what I can with him—but you must go."

"You don't stand upon ceremony, I think," grumbled the boy, throwing his bread and butter about, in an ill-humor.

She made no answer.

"I tell you what," said the boy, bursting out into an angry whimpering, "you're a selfish jade, and you think there's not enough for three of us, and want to get rid of me."

"If you believe so, Charley,—yes, then I believe too that I am a selfish jade, and that I think there's not enough for three of us, and that I want to get rid of you."

It was only when the boy rushed at her, and threw his arms around her neck, that she lost her self-restraint.

"Don't cry, don't cry! I am satisfied to go, Liz. I know you send me away for my good."

"O, Charley, Charley, Heaven above us knows I do!"

"Yes, yes. Don't mind what I said. Don't remember it. Kiss me."

After a silence, she loosed him, to dry her eyes and regain her strong quiet influence.

"Now listen, Charley dear. We both know it must be done, and I alone know there is good reason for its being done at once. Go straight to the school, and say that you and I agreed upon it—that we can't overcome father's opposition—that father will never trouble them, but will never take you back. Show what clothes you have brought, and what money, and say that I will send some more money. If I can get some in no other way, I will ask a little help of those two gentlemen who came here that night."

"I say!" cried her brother, quickly, "don't you have it of that Wrayburn one!"

Perhaps a slight additional tinge of red flashed up into her face and brow, as with a nod she laid a hand upon his lips to keep him silently attentive.

"And above all things mind this, Charley: Be sure you always speak well of father. Good-bye, my Darling!"

Lizzie, looking for her father, saw him coming, and stood upon the causeway that he might see her. He had nothing with him but his boat, and came on apace. Carrying the sculls with Lizzie's aid, he passed up to his dwelling.

"Sit close to the fire, father, dear, while I cook your breakfast. You must be frozen."

"Well, Lizzie, I ain't of a glow; that's certain. And my hands seemed nailed through to the sculls. See how dead they are!"

"You were not out in the perishing night, I hope, father?"

"No, my dear. Lay aboard a barge, by a blazing coal-fire.—Where's that boy?"

"There's a drop of brandy for your tea, father, if you'll put it in while I turn this bit of meat. If the river was to get frozen, there would be a deal of distress; wouldn't there, father?"

"Ah! there's always enough of that," said Gaffer; "distress is for ever a going about, like sut in the air—Ain't that boy up yet?"

"The meat's ready now, father. Eat it while it's hot and comfortable. After you have finished, we'll turn round to the fire and talk."

But he perceived that he was evaded, and, having thrown a hasty angry glance toward the bunk, plucked at a corner of her apron and asked:

"What's gone with that boy?"

"Father, if you'll begin your breakfast, I'll sit by and tell you. Don't be angry, dear. It seems, father, that he has quite a gift of learning,"

"Unnat'ral young beggar!" said the parent, shaking his knife in the air.

"—And that having this gift, and not being equally good at other things, he has made shift to get some schooling."

"Unnat'ral young beggar!" said the parent again, with his former action.

"—And that knowing you have nothing to spare, father, and not wishing to be a burden on you, he gradually made up his mind to go seek his fortune out of learning. He went away this morning, father, and he cried very much at going, and he hoped you would forgive him."

"Let him never come a-nigh me to ask me my forgiveness," said the father, again emphasizing his words with the knife. "Let him never come within sight of my eyes, nor yet within reach of my arm. His own father ain't good enough for him. He's disowned his own father. His own father therefore disowns him for ever and ever, as a unnatural young beggar."

He now clutched his knife overhand, and struck downward with it at the end of every succeeding sentence.

Lizzie stopped him with a cry. Looking at her he saw her, with a face quite strange to him, shrinking back against the wall, with her hands before her eyes.

"Father, don't! I can't bear to see you striking with it. Put it down!"

He looked at the knife; but still held it.

"Father, it's too horrible. O, put it down, put it down!"

He tossed it away, and stood up with his open hands held out before him.

"What's come to you, Liz? Can you think I would strike at you with a knife?"

"No, father, no; you would never hurt me."

"What should I hurt?"

"Nothing, dear father. On my knees, I am certain, in my heart and soul I am certain, nothing! But it was too dreadful to bear; for it looked—"

The recollection of his murderous figure, combining with her trial of last night, and her trial of the morning, caused her to drop at his feet, without having answered.

He had never seen her so before. He raised her with the utmost tenderness, calling her the best of daughters, and "my poor pretty creetur." He laid her head gently down, got a pillow and placed it under her dark hair, and sought on the table for a spoonful of brandy. There being none left, he hurriedly caught up the empty bottle, and ran out.

He returned as hurriedly as he had gone, with the bottle still empty. He kneeled down by her, took her head on his arm, and moistened her lips with a little water into which he dipped his fingers: saying, fiercely, as he looked around, now over this shoulder, now over that:

"Have we got a pest in the house? Is there summ'at

deadly sticking to my clothes? What's let loose upon us? Who loosed it?"

CHAPTER VII.

SILAS WEGG, being on his road to the Roman Empire, approaches it by way of Clerkenwell. He goes in at a dark greasy entry, pushes a little greasy dark reluctant side-door, and follows the door into a little dark greasy shop. It is so dark that nothing can be made out in it, over a little counter, but a tallow candle in an old tin candlestick, close to the face of a man stooping low in a chair.

"Good evening, Mr. Venus. Don't you remember?"

"To be *sure*!" says Mr. Venus. "How do you do?"

"Wegg, you know," that gentleman explains.

"Yes, yes," says the other. "Hospital amputation?"

"Just so," says Mr. Wegg.

"Yes, yes," quoth Venus. "How do you do? Sit down by the fire, and warm your—your other one."

"And how have I been going on, this long time, Mr. Venus?"

"Very bad," says Mr. Venus uncompromisingly.

"What? Am I still at home?" asks Wegg with an air of surprise.

"Always at home. I can't work you into a miscellaneous one, nohow. Do what I will, you can't be got to fit. You're casting your eye round the shop, Mr. Wegg. Let me show you a light. My working bench. My young man's bench. A Wice. Tools. Bones, wariou. Skulls, wariou. Preserved Indian baby. African ditto. Bottled preparations, wariou. Everything within reach of your hand, in good preservation. The mouldy ones a-top. What's in those hampers over them again, I don't quite remember. Say, human wariou. Cats. Articulated English baby. Dogs. Ducks. Glass eyes, wariou. Mummied bird. Dried cuticle, wariou. Oh, dear me! That's the general panoramic view."

Having so held and waved the candle as that all these heterogeneous objects seemed to come forward obediently when they were named, and then retire again, Mr Venus

despondently repeats, "Oh dear me, dear me!" and resumes his seat.

"Where am I?" asks Mr. Wegg.

"You're somewhere in the back shop across the yard, sir; and speaking quite candidly, I wish I'd never bought you of the hospital porter."

"Now, look here, what did you give for me?"

"Well," replied Venus, "you were one of a warioous lot, and I don't know."

"What will you take for me?"

"Well," replied Venus, "I'm not prepared, at a moment's notice, to tell you, Mr. Wegg."

"Come! According to your own account I'm not worth much," Wegg reasons persuasively.

"Not for miscellaneous working in, I grant you, Mr. Wegg; but you might turn out waluable yet, as a—as a Monstrosity, if you'll excuse me."

Repressing an indignant look, indicative of anything but a disposition to excuse him, Silas pursues his point.

"I think you know me, Mr. Venus, and I think you know I never bargain. I have a prospect of getting on in life and elevating myself by my own independent exertions, and I shouldn't like—I tell you openly I should *not* like—under such circumstances, to be what I may call dispersed, a part of me here, and a part of me there, but should wish to collect myself, like a genteel person."

"It's a prospect at present, is it, Mr. Wegg? Then you haven't got the money for a deal about you? Then I'll tell you what I'll do with you; I'll hold you over. I am a man of my word, and you needn't be afraid of my disposing of you. I'll hold you over. That's a promise. Oh dear me, dear me!"

"You seem very low, Mr. Venus. Is business bad?"

"Never was so good. Not to name myself as a workman without an equal, I've gone on improving myself in my knowledge of Anatomy, till both by sight and by name I'm perfect. Mr. Wegg, if you was brought here loose in a bag to articulate, I'd name your smallest bones blindfold equally with your largest, as fast as I could pick 'em out, and I'd sort' em all, and sort your wertebrae, in a manner that would equally surprise and charm you. But it's the heart

that lowers me, it is the heart! Be so good as to take and read that card out loud."

Silas receives one from his hand, which Venus takes from a wonderful litter in a drawer, and putting on his spectacles, reads:

"'Mr. Venus,'"

"Yes. Go on."

"'Preserver of Animals and Birds,'"

"Yes. Go on."

"'Articulator of human bones.'"

"That's it," with a groan. "That's it! Mr. Wegg, I'm thirty-two, and a bachelor. Mr. Wegg, I love her. She objects to the business. 'I do not wish,' she writes in her own hand-writing, 'to regard myself, nor yet to be regarded, in that bony light.' It lowers me. When I'm equally lowered all over, lethargy sets in. Don't let me detain you, Mr. Wegg. I'm not company for any one."

"It is not on that account," says Silas, rising, "but because I've got an appointment. It's time I was at Harmon's."

"Eh?" said Mr. Venus. "Harmon's up Battle Bridge way? You ought to be in a good thing, if you've worked yourself in there. There's lots of money going, there."

"To think," says Silas, "that you should catch it up so quick, and know about it. Wonderful!"

"Not at all, Mr. Wegg. The old gentleman wanted to know the nature and worth of everything that was found in the dust; and many's the bone, and feather, and what not, that he's brought to me."

"Really, now!"

"I took an interest in that discovery in the river," says Venus. "(She hadn't written her cutting refusal at that time.) I've got up there—never mind, though." He broke off, and added:

"The old gentleman was well known all around here. There used to be stories about his having hidden all kinds of property in those dust mounds. I suppose there was nothing in 'em. Probably you know, Mr. Wegg?"

"Nothing in 'em," says Wegg, who has never heard a word of this before.

"Don't let me detain you. Good night!"

CHAPTER VIII.

“**M**ORNING, morning, morning!” said Mr. Boffin, with a wave of his hand, as Mr. Mortimer Lightwood’s office door was opened by a dismal boy, whose appropriate name was Blight. “Governor in?”

“Mr. Lightwood ain’t in at the present moment, but I expect him back very shortly. Would you take a seat in Mr. Lightwood’s room, sir, while I look over our Appointment Book?” Young Blight made a great show of fetching from his desk a long thin manuscript volume, and running his fingers down the day’s appointments, murmuring, “Mr. Aggs, Mr. Baggs, Mr. Caggs, Mr. Daggs, Mr. Faggs, Mr. Gaggs, Mr. Boffin. Yes, sir; quite right. You are a little before your time, sir. Mr. Lightwood will be in directly.”

“I’m not in a hurry,” said Mr. Boffin.

“Thank you, sir. I’ll take the opportunity, if you please, of entering your name in our Caller’s Book for the day.” Young Blight made another great show of changing the volume, taking up a pen, sucking it, dipping it, and running over previous entries before he wrote. As, “Mr. Alley, Mr. Balley, Mr. Calley, Mr. Dalley, Mr. Falley, Mr. Galley, Mr. Halley, Mr. Lalley, Mr. Malley. And Mr. Boffin.”

“Strict system here; eh, my lad?” said Mr. Boffin, as he was booked.

“Yes, sir,” said the boy. “I couldn’t get on without it.”

By which he probably meant that his mind would have been shattered to pieces without this fiction of an occupation. It was the more necessary for his spirits, because, being of a sensitive temperament, he was apt to consider it personally disgraceful to himself that his master had no clients.

Mr. Boffin sat staring at a little book-case of Law Practice and Law Reports, and at a window, and at an empty blue bag, and at a stick of sealing-wax, and a pen, and a box of wafers, and an apple, and a writing-pad—all very dusty—and at a number of inky smears and blots, and at an imperfectly disguised gun-case pretending to be something legal, and at an iron box labeled HARMON ESTATE, until Mr. Lightwood appeared.

Mr. Lightwood explained that he came from the proctor's, with whom he had been engaged in transacting Mr. Boffin's affairs, and that, all forms of law having been at length complied with, he, Mr. Lightwood, had now the great gratification, honor, happiness and so forth, of congratulating Mr. Boffin on coming into possession, as residuary legatee, of upwards of one hundred thousand pounds, standing in the books of the Governor and Company of the Bank of England, and so forth.

"Why, Lord save us!" said Mr. Boffin, "when we come to take it to pieces, bit by bit, where's the satisfactoriness of the money? When the old man does right the poor boy after all, the poor boy gets no good of it. He gets made away with, at the moment when he's lifting (as one may say) the cup and sarser to his lips. Mr. Lightwood, I will now name to you, that on behalf of the poor dear boy, me and Mrs. Boffin have stood out against the old man times out of number, till he has called us every name he could lay his tongue to. The last time me and Mrs. Boffin saw the poor boy, he was a child of seven year old. For when he come back to make intercession for his sister, me and Mrs. Boffin were away overlooking a country contract which was to be sifted before carted, and he was come and gone in a single hour. I say he was a child of seven year old. He was going away, all alone and forlorn, to that foreign school, and he come into our place, situate up the yard of the present Bower, to have a warm at our fire. There was his little scanty traveling clothes upon him. There was his little scanty box outside in the shivering wind, which I was going to carry for him down to the steamboat, as the old man wouldn't hear of allowing a sixpence coach-money. The poor child clings to Mrs. Boffin for a while, as she clings to him, and then, when the old man calls, he says 'I must go! God bless you!' and for a moment rests his heart against her bosom, and looks up at both of us, as if it was in pain—in agony. Such a look! I went aboard with him (I gave him first what little treat I thought he'd like), and I left him when he had fallen asleep in his berth, and I came back to Mrs. Boffin. But tell her what I would of how I had left him, it all went for nothing,

for, according to her thoughts, he never changed that look that he had looked up at us two. But it did one piece of good. Mrs. Boffin and me had no child of our own, and had sometimes wished that how we had one. But not now. 'We might both of us die,' says Mrs. Boffin, 'and other eyes might see that lonely look in our child.'

"Well, sir. So Mrs. Boffin and me grow older and older in the old man's service, living and working pretty hard in it, till the old man is discovered dead in his bed. Then Mrs. Boffin and me seal up his box, always standing on the table at the side of his bed, and having frequently heard tell of the Temple as a spot where lawyers' dust is contracted for, I come down here in search of a lawyer to advise, and I see your young man up at this present elevation, chopping at the flies on the window-sill with his penknife, and I give him a Hoy! not then having the pleasure of your acquaintance, and by that means come to gain the honor. Then you, and the gentleman in the uncomfortable neck-cloth under the little archway in Saint Paul's Churchyard—"

"Doctors' Commons," observed Lightwood.

"I understood it was another name," said Mr. Boffin, pausing, "but you know best. Then you and Doctor Scummons, you go to work, and you do the thing that's proper, and you and Dr. S. take steps for finding out the poor boy, and at last you do find out the poor boy, and me and Mrs. Boffin often exchange the observation, 'We shall see him again, under happy circumstances.' But it was never to be; and the want of satisfactoriness is, that after all the money never gets to him."

"But it gets," remarked Lightwood with a languid inclination of the head, "into excellent hands."

"It gets into the hands of me and Mrs. Boffin only this very day and hour, and that's what I'm working round to, having waited for this day and hour a' purpose. Mr. Lightwood, here has been a wicked cruel murder. By that murder me and Mrs. Boffin mysteriously profit. For the apprehension and conviction of the murderer, we offer a reward of one tithe of the property—a reward of Ten Thousand Pound. There is just one other thing. Make me as compact a little will as can be reconciled with tightness,

leaving the whole of the property to 'my beloved wife, Henerietty Boffin, sole executrix.'"

Mr. Lightwood, having taken that instruction, showed Mr. Boffin out.

Jogging along Fleet Street he became aware that he was closely tracked and observed by a man of genteel appearance.

"Now then?" said Mr. Boffin, stopping short, "what's the next article?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Boffin."

"My name too, eh? How did you come by it? I don't know you. If I don't mistake, you have followed me from my lawyer's and tried to fix my attention. Say out! Have you? Or haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Why have you?"

"If you will allow me to walk beside you, Mr. Boffin, I will tell you. I am afraid my object is a bold one, I am afraid it has little of the usual practical world about it, but I venture it. You will probably change your manner of living, Mr. Boffin, in your changed circumstances. You will probably keep a larger house, have many matters to arrange, and be beset by numbers of correspondents. If you would try me as your Secretary—"

"As *what*?" cried Mr. Boffin, with his eyes wide open.

"Your Secretary."

"Well," said Mr. Boffin, under his breath, "that's a queer thing!"

"Or," pursued the stranger, wondering at Mr. Boffin's wonder, "if you would try me as your man of business under any name, I know you would find me faithful and grateful, and I hope you will find me useful. You may naturally think that my immediate object is money. Not so, for I would willingly serve you a year—two years—any term you might appoint—before that should begin to be a consideration between us."

"Where do you come from?" asked Mr. Boffin.

"I come," returned the other, meeting his eye, "from many countries."

"From—any particular place?"

"I have been in many places."

"What have you been?" asked Mr. Boffin.

"I have been a student and a traveler."

"But if it ain't a liberty to plump it out," said Mr. Boffin, "what do you do for your living?"

"I have mentioned what I aspire to do. I have been superseded as to some slight intentions I had, and I may say that I have now to begin life. All this time," said the stranger, producing a card, "I have not mentioned my name. My name is Rokesmith. I lodge at one Mr. Wilfer's, at Holloway."

"Father of Miss Bella Wilfer?"

"My landlord has a daughter named Bella. Yes; no doubt."

"That's singular, too! Well, sir, to tell you the truth, I don't know what to say to you."

"Say nothing," returned Mr. Rokesmith: "allow me to call on you in a few days."

"That's fair, and I don't object," said Mr. Boffin; "you can call at the Bower any time in a week or two. It's not above a mile or so from you, and your landlord can direct you to it. But as he may not know it by its new name of Boffin's Bower, say, when you inquire of him, it's Harmon's; will you?"

"Harmoon's," repeated Mr. Rokesmith, seeming to have caught the sound imperfectly, "Harmarn's. How do you spell it?"

"Why, as to the spelling of it," returned Mr. Boffin, with great presence of mind, "that's *your* look-out. Harmon's all you've got to say to *him*. Morning, morning, morning!" And so departed, without looking back.

CHAPTER IX.

BETAKING himself straight homeward, Mr. Boffin, without further let or hinderance, arrived at the Bower, and gave Mrs. Boffin (in a walking dress of black velvet and feathers, like a mourning coach-horse) an account of all he had said and done since breakfast.

"This brings us round, my dear," he then pursued, "to the

question we left unfinished: namely, whether there's to be any new go-in for Fashion."

"Now I'll tell you what I want, Noddy," said Mrs. Boffin, smoothing her dress with an air of immense enjoyment, "I want Society. *I* say, a good house in a good neighborhood, good things about us, good living, and good society. *I* say, live like our means, without extravagance, and be happy. Next I think—and I really have been thinking early and late—of the disappointed girl; her that was so cruelly disappointed, you know, both of her husband and his riches. Don't you think we might do something for her? Have her to live with us? Or something of that sort?"

"Ne-ver once thought of the way of doing it!" cried Mr. Boffin, smiting the table in his admiration. "What a thinking steam-ingen in this old lady is. And she don't know how she does it. Neither does the ingen!"

"Last, and not least, I have taken a fancy. You remember dear little John Harmon, before he went to school? Over yonder across the yard, at our fire? Now that he is past all benefit of the money, and it's come to us, I should like to find some orphan child, and take the boy and adopt him and give him John's name, and provide for him. Somehow it would make me easier, I fancy. Say it's only a whim—"

"But I don't say so," interposed her husband.

"No, but deary, if you did—"

"I should be a Beast if I did."

"That's as much as to say you agree? Good and kind of you, and like you, deary!"

Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, sitting side by side, with Fashion withdrawn to an immeasurable distance, fell to discussing how they could best find their orphan. Finally Mrs. Boffin suggested application to their clergyman. They resolved to call upon the reverend gentleman at once, and to take the same opportunity of making acquaintance with Miss Bella Wilfer.

The Reverend Frank Milvey's abode was a very modest abode, because his income was a very modest income.

With a ready patient face and manner, and yet with a latent smile that showed a quick enough observation of Mrs.

Boffin's dress, Mr. Milvey, in his little book-room—charged with sounds and cries as though the six children above were coming down through the ceiling, and the roasting leg of mutton below were coming up through the floor—listened to Mrs. Boffin's statement of her want of an orphan.

"I think we had better take Mrs. Milvey into our Council. Margaretta, my dear!" Mrs. Milvey came down.

"Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, my dear, whose good fortune you have heard of. Mrs. Boffin wishes to adopt an orphan, and I was thinking, Margaretta, that perhaps old Mrs. Goody's grandchild might answer the purpose."

"Oh my *dear* Frank! I *don't* think," said Mrs. Milvey, "—and I believe my husband will agree with me when he considers it again—that you could possibly keep that orphan clean from snuff. Because his grandmother takes so *many* ounces, and drops it over him."

"But he would not be living with his grandmother then, Margaretta," said Mr. Milvey.

"No, Frank, but it would be impossible to keep her from Mrs. Boffin's house; and the *more* there was to eat and drink there, the oftener she would go. And she *is* an inconvenient woman. I *hope* it's not uncharitable to remember that last Christmas Eve she drank eleven cups of tea, and grumbled all the time. And she is *not* a grateful woman, Frank. You recollect her addressing a crowd outside this house, about her wrongs, when, one night after we had gone to bed, she brought back the petticoat of new flannel that had been given her, because it was too short."

"That's true," said Mr. Milvey. "I don't think that would do. Would little Harrison—"

"Oh, *Frank!*" remonstrated his emphatic wife.

"He has no grandmother, my dear."

"No, but I *don't* think Mrs. Boffin would like an orphan who squints so *much*."

"That's true again," said Mr. Milvey, becoming haggard with perplexity. "If a little girl would do—"

"But, my *dear* Frank, Mrs. Boffin wants a boy."

"That's true again," said Mr. Milvey. "Tom Bocker is a nice boy" (thoughtfully).

"But I *doubt*, Frank," Mrs. Milvey hinted, after a little

hesitation, "if Mrs. Boffin wants an orphan *quite* nineteen, who drives a cart and waters the roads."

"We have orphans, I know," pursued Mr. Milvey, quite with the air as if he might have added "in stock," and it was resolved that Mr. and Mrs. Milvey should search for an orphan likely to suit.

"Now, old lady," said Mr. Boffin, as they resumed their seats, "having made a very agreeable visit there, we'll try Wilfer's."

Three pulls at the bell produced no external result, though each was attended by audible sounds of scampering and rushing within. At the fourth tug—vindictively administered by the hammer-headed driver,—Miss Lavinia appeared, emerging from the house in an accidental manner, with a bonnet and parasol, as designing to take a contemplative walk. The young lady was astonished to find visitors at the gate, and expressed her feelings in appropriate action.

"Here's Mr. and Mrs. Boffin!" growled the hammer-headed young man through the bars of the gate, and at the same time shaking it, as if he were on view in a menagerie; "they've been here half an hour."

"Who did you say?" asked Miss Lavinia.

"Mr. and Mrs. BOFFIN!" returned the young man, rising into a roar.

Miss Lavinia tripped up the steps to the house-door, tripped down the steps with the key, tripped across the little garden, and opened the gate. "Please to walk in," said Miss Lavinia, haughtily. "Our servant is out."

After waiting a quarter of an hour alone in the family sitting-room, Mrs. Boffin became aware of the entrance of Mrs. Wilfer, majestically faint, and with a condescending stitch in her side: which was her company manner.

"Pardon me," said Mrs. Wilfer, after the first salutations, and as soon as she had adjusted the handkerchief under her chin, and waved her gloved hands, "to what am I indebted for this honor?"

"To make short of it, ma'am," returned Mr. Boffin, "perhaps you may be acquainted with the names of me and Mrs. Boffin, as having come into a certain property."

"I have heard, sir," returned Mrs. Wilfer, with a dignified bend of her head, "of such being the case."

"And I dare say, ma'am," pursued Mr. Boffin, "you are not very much inclined to take kindly to us? Mrs. Boffin and me, ma'am, are plain people, and we don't want to pretend to anything, nor yet to go round and round at anything; because there's always a straight way to everything. Consequently, we make this call to say, that we shall be glad to have the honor and pleasure of your daughter's acquaintance, and that we shall be rejoiced if your daughter will come to consider our house in the light of her home equally with this. In short, we want to cheer your daughter, and to give her the opportunity of sharing such pleasures as we are a going to take ourselves. We want to brisk her up, and brisk her about, and give her a change."

"That's it!" said the open-hearted Mrs. Boffin. "Lor! Let's be comfortable."

Mrs. Wilfer bent her head in a distant manner to her lady visitor, and with majestic monotony replied to the gentleman:

"Pardon me. I have several daughters. Which of my daughters am I to understand is thus favored by the kind intentions of Mr. Boffin and his lady?"

"Don't you see?" the ever-smiling Mrs. Boffin put in. "Naturally, Miss Bella, you know."

"Oh-h!" said Mrs. Wilfer, with a severely unconvinced look. "My daughter Bella is accessible and shall speak for herself." Then opening the door a little way, simultaneously with a sound of scuttling outside it, the good lady made the proclamation, "Send Miss Bella to me!" Which proclamation, though grandly formal, and one might almost say heraldic, to hear, was in fact enunciated with her maternal eyes reproachfully glaring on that young lady in the flesh—and in so much of it that she was retiring with difficulty into the small closet under the stairs, apprehensive of the emergence of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin.

Miss Bella appeared; whom Mrs. Wilfer presented, and to whom she explained the purpose of the visitors.

"I am much obliged to you, I am sure," said Miss Bella, coldly shaking her curls, "but I doubt if I have the inclination to go out at all."

"Bella!" Mrs. Wilfer admonished her; "Bella, you must conquer this."

"Yes, do what your Ma says, and conquer it, my dear," urged Mrs. Boffin, "because we shall be so glad to have you, and because you are much too pretty to keep yourself shut up." With that, the pleasant creature gave her a kiss, and patted her on her dimpled shoulders.

"We are going to move into a nice house," said Mrs. Boffin, who was woman enough to compromise Mr. Boffin on that point, when he couldn't very well contest it; "and we are going to set up a nice carriage, and we'll go everywhere and see everything, And you mustn't," seating Bella beside her, and patting her hand, "you mustn't feel a dislike to us to begin with, because we couldn't help it, you know, my dear."

With the natural tendency of youth to yield to candor and sweet temper, Miss Bella was so touched by the simplicity of this address that she frankly returned Mrs. Boffin's kiss.

The easy pair proposed to Bella that as soon as they should be in a condition to receive her in a manner suitable to their desires, Mrs. Boffin should return with notice of the fact. This arrangement Mrs. Wilfer sanctioned with a stately inclination of her head and wave of her gloves, as who should say, "Your demerits shall be overlooked, and you shall be mercifully gratified, poor people."

"By-the-by, ma'am," said Mr. Boffin, turning back as he was going, "you have a lodger?"

"A gentleman," Mrs. Wilfer answered, qualifying the low expression, "undoubtedly occupies our first floor."

"I may call him Our Mutual Friend," said Mr. Boffin. "What sort of a fellow is Our Mutual Friend, now? Do you like him?"

"Mr. Rokesmith is very punctual, very quiet, a very eligible inmate."

"Because," Mr. Boffin explained, "you must know that I'm not particularly well acquainted with Our Mutual Friend, for I have only seen him once. You give a good account of him. Is he at home?"

"Mr. Rokesmith is at home," said Mrs. Wilfer; "indeed, there he stands at the garden gate. Waiting for you, perhaps?"

"How are you, sir, how are you?" said Mr. Boffin. "This is Mrs. Boffin. Mr. Rokesmith, that I told you of, my dear."

She gave him good day, and he bestirred himself and helped her to her seat, and the like, with a ready hand.

"Good-bye for the present, Miss Bella," said Mrs. Boffin, calling out a hearty parting. "We shall meet again soon! And then I hope I shall have my little John Harmon to show you."

Mr. Rokesmith, who was at the wheel adjusting the skirts of her dress, suddenly looked behind him, and around him, and then looked up at her, with a face so pale that Mrs. Boffin cried:

"Gracious!" And after a moment, "What's the matter, sir?"

"How can you show her the Dead?" returned Mr. Rokesmith.

"It's only an adopted child. One I have told her of. One I'm going to give the name to!"

"You took me by surprise," said Mr. Rokesmith, "and it sounded like an omen that you should speak of showing the Dead to one so young and blooming."

Now, Bella suspected by this time that Mr. Rokesmith admired her. Whether the knowledge (for it was rather that than suspicion) caused her to incline to him a little more, or a little less, than she had done at first; whether it rendered her eager to find out more about him, because she sought to establish reason for her distrust, or because she sought to free him from it; was as yet dark to her own heart. But at most times he occupied a great amount of her attention, and she had set her attention closely on this incident.

CHAPTER X.

THERE is excitement in the Veneering mansion. The mature young lady is going to be married (powder and all) to the mature young gentleman, and she is to be married from the Veneering house, and the Veneerings are to give the breakfast.

The mature young lady is a lady of property. The mature young gentleman is a gentleman of property.

It would seem that both the mature young lady and the mature young gentleman must indubitably be Veneering's oldest friends.

The morning has passed. The trumpets of fashion have described how that on the seventeenth instant, at St. James's Church, the Reverend Blank Blank, assisted by the Reverend Dash Dash, united in the bonds of matrimony, Alfred Lammle, Esquire, of Sackville Street, Piccadilly, to Sophronia, only daughter of the late Horatio Akershem, Esquire, of Yorkshire. Also how the fair bride was married from the house of Hamilton Veneering, Esquire, of Stucconia, and was given away by Melvin Twemlow, Esquire, of Duke Street, St. James's, second cousin to Lord Snigsworth, of Snigsworthy Park.

And it is all over.

All over, that is to say, for the time being. But, there is another time to come, and it comes in about a fortnight, and it comes to Mr. and Mrs. Lammle on the sands at Shanklin, in the Isle of Wight.

Mr. and Mrs. Lammle have walked for some time on the Shanklin sands, and one may see by their footprints that they have not walked arm in arm, and that they have not walked in a straight track, and that they have walked in a moody humor; for the lady has prodded little spirting holes in the damp sand before her with her parasol, and the gentleman has trailed his stick after him. As if he were of the Mephistopheles family indeed, and had walked with a drooping tail.

"Do you mean to tell me, then, Sophronia—"

"Don't put it upon *me*, sir. I ask you, do *you* mean to tell me? Do *I* mean to say!" Mrs. Lammle after a time repeats, with indignation. "Putting it on me! The unmanly disingenuousness!"

"The what?"

Mrs. Lammle replies, "The meanness."

"That is not what you said. You said disingenuousness."

"What if I did?"

"There is no 'if' in the case. You did."

"I did then. And what of it?"

"What of it?" says Mr. Lammle. "Have you the face to utter the word to me?"

"The face, too!" replied Mrs. Lammle, staring at him with cold scorn. "Pray, how dare you, sir, utter the word to me?"

"I never did."

As this happens to be true, Mrs. Lammle is thrown on the feminine resource of saying, "I don't care what you uttered or did not utter."

After a little more walking and a little more silence, Mr. Lammle breaks the latter.

"Do I mean to tell you what?"

"That you are a man of property?"

"No."

"Then you married me on false pretenses?"

"So be it. Do you mean to say you are a woman of property?"

"No."

"Then you married me on false pretenses."

"If you were so dull a fortune-hunter that you deceived yourself, or if you were so greedy and grasping that you were over-willing to be deceived by appearances, is it my fault, you adventurer?"

"I asked Veneering, and he told me you were rich."

"Veneering!" with great contempt. "And what does Veneering know about me!"

"Was he not your trustee?"

"No. I have no trustee, but the one you saw on the day when you fraudulently married me. And this trust is not a very difficult one, for it is only an annuity of a hundred and fifteen pounds. I think there are some odd shillings or pence, if you are very particular."

"Question for question. It is my turn again, Mrs. Lammle. What made you suppose me a man of property?"

"You made me suppose you so. Perhaps you will deny that you always presented yourself to me in that character?"

"But you asked somebody, too. Come, Mrs. Lammle, admission for admission. You asked somebody?"

"I asked Veneering."

"And Veneering knew as much of me as he knew of you, or as anybody knows of him."

After more silent walking, the bride stops short, to say in a passionate manner:

"I never will forgive the Veneerings for this!"

"Neither will I," returns the bridegroom.

"Do you pretend to believe," Mrs. Lammle resumes, sternly, "when you talk of my marrying you for worldly advantages, that it was within the bounds of reasonable probability that I would have married you for yourself?"

"Again there are two sides to the question, Mrs. Lammle. What do you pretend to believe?"

"So you first deceive me and then insult me!" cries the lady, with a heaving bosom.

"Not at all. I have originated nothing. The double-edged question was yours."

"Was mine!" the bride repeats, and her parasol breaks in her angry hand.

His color has turned to a livid white, and ominous marks have come to light about his nose, as if the finger of the very devil himself had, within the last few moments, touched it here and there. But he has repressive power, and she has none.

"Throw it away," he coolly recommends as to the parasol; "you have made it useless; you look ridiculous with it."

Whereupon she calls him in her rage, "A deliberate villain," and so casts the broken thing from her as that it strikes him in falling. The finger-marks are something whiter for the instant, but he walks on at her side.

She bursts into tears, declaring herself the wretchedest, the most deceived, the worst-used, of women. Then she says that if she had the courage to kill herself, she would do it. Then she calls him vile impostor. Then she asks him why, in the disappointment of his base speculation, he does not take her life with his own hand, under the present favorable circumstances. Then she cries again. Then she is enraged again, and makes some mention of swindlers. Finally, she sits down crying on a block of stone, and is in all the known and unknown humors of her sex at once. Pending her changes, those aforesaid marks in his face have come and gone, now here now there, like white stops of a pipe on which the diabolical performer has played a tune. Also his livid lips are parted at last, as if he were breathless with running. Yet he is not.

"Now, get up, Mrs. Lammle, and let us speak reasonably."

Yielding to his hand, she rises, and they walk again ; but this time with their faces towards their place of residence.

"Mrs. Lammle, we have both been deceiving, and we have both been deceived. We have both been biting, and we have both been bitten. In a nutshell, there's the state of the case. You are now cool enough, Sophronia, to see that you can't be injured without my being equally injured. First, then, we must keep this matter to ourselves. You agree?"

"If it is possible, I do."

"Possible! We have pretended well enough to one another. Can't we, united, pretend to the world? Agreed. Secondly, we owe the Veneerings a grudge, and we owe all other people the grudge of wishing them to be taken in, as we ourselves have been taken in. Agreed?"

"Yes. Agreed."

"We come smoothly to thirdly. You have called me an adventurer, Sophronia. So I am. In plain uncomplimentary English, so I am. So are you, my dear. So are many people. We agree to keep our own secret, and to work together in furtherance of our own schemes."

"What schemes?"

"Any scheme that will bring us money. By our own schemes, I mean our joint interest. Agreed?"

She answers, after a little hesitation, "I suppose so. Agreed."

"Carried at once, you see! Now, to wind up all:—You have shown temper to-day, Sophronia. Don't be betrayed into doing so again, because I have a devil of a temper myself."

CHAPTER XI.

MR. PODSNAP was well to do, and stood very high in Mr. Podsnap's opinion.

Mr. Podsnap's world was not a very large world, morally ; no, not even geographically : seeing that although his business was sustained upon commerce with other countries, he considered other countries, with that important reservation, a mistake, and of their manners and customs would

conclusively observe, "Not English!" when *PRESTO!* with a flourish of the arm, and a flush of the face, they were swept away.

A certain institution in Mr. Podsnap's mind which he called "the young person" may be considered to have been embodied in Miss Podsnap, his daughter. It was an inconvenient and exacting institution, as requiring everything in the universe to be filed down and fitted to it. The question about everything was, would it bring a blush into the cheek of the young person?

Said Mr. Podsnap to Mrs. Podsnap, "Georgiana is almost eighteen."

Said Mrs. Podsnap to Mr. Podsnap, assenting, "Almost eighteen."

Said Mr. Podsnap then to Mrs. Podsnap, "Really I think we should have some people on Georgiana's birthday."

Said Mrs. Podsnap then to Mr. Podsnap, "Which will enable us to clear off all those people who are due."

So it came to pass that Mr. and Mrs. Podsnap requested the honor of the company of seventeen friends of their souls at dinner.

Mr. and Mrs. Veneering, and Mr. and Mrs. Veneering's bran-new bride and bridegroom, were of the company.

The majority of the guests were like the plate, and included several heavy articles weighing ever so much. But there was a foreign gentleman among them, whom Mr. Podsnap had invited after much debate with himself—believing the whole European continent to be in mortal alliance against the young person—and there was a droll disposition, not only on the part of Mr. Podsnap, but of everybody else, to treat him as if he were a child who was hard of hearing.

As a delicate concession to this unfortunately-born foreigner, Mr. Podsnap, in receiving him, had presented his wife as "Madame Podsnap;" also his daughter as "Madoiselle Podsnap," with some inclination to add "ma fille," in which bold venture, however, he checked himself. The Veneerings being at that time the only other arrivals, he had added (in a condescendingly explanatory manner), "Monsieur Vey-nairreeng," and had then subsided into English.

"How Do You Like London?" Mr. Podsnap now inquir-

ed from his station of host, as if he were administering something in the nature of a powder or potion to the deaf child ;
 "London, Londres, London ?"

The foreign gentleman admired it.

"You find it Very Large?" said Mr. Podsnap, spaciously.

The foreign gentleman found it very large.

"And Very Rich?"

The foreign gentleman found it, without doubt, énormément riche.

"Enormously Rich, We say," returned Mr. Podsnap, in a condescending manner. "Our English adverbs do Not terminate in Mong, and We Pronounce the 'ch' as if there were a 't' before it. We Say Ritch."

"Reetch," remarked the foreign gentleman.

"And Do You Find, Sir," pursued Mr. Podsnap, with dignity, "Many Evidences that Strike You, of our British Constitution in the Streets Of The World's Metropolis, London, Londres, London?"

The foreign gentleman begged to be pardoned, but did not altogether understand.

"The Constitution Britannique," Mr. Podsnap explained, as if he were teaching in an infant school. "We Say British, But You Say Britannique, You Know," (forgivingly, as if that were not his fault). "The Constitution, Sir."

The foreign gentleman said, "Mais, Yees; I know eem."

"I Was Inquiring," said Mr. Podsnap, "Whether You Have Observed in our Streets as We should say, Upon our Pavvy as You would say, any Tokens—"

The foreign gentleman, with patient courtesy, entreated pardon; "But what was tokenz?"

"Marks," said Mr. Podsnap; "Signs, you know, Appearances—Traces."

"Ah! of a Orse?" inquired the foreign gentleman.

"We call it Horse," said Mr. Podsnap, with forbearance. "In England, Angleterre, England, We Aspirate the 'H,' and We Say 'Horse.' Only our Lower Classes Say 'Orse!'"

"Pardon," said the foreign gentleman; "I am alwiz wrong!"

"Our Language," said Mr. Podsnap, with a gracious consciousness of being always right, "is Difficult. Ours is a Co-

pious Language, and Trying to Strangers. I will not Pursue my Question. It merely referred to Our Constitution, Sir. We Englishmen are Very Proud of our Constitution, Sir. It Was Bestowed Upon Us By Providence. No Other Country is so Favored as This Country."

"And ozer countries?"—the foreign gentleman was beginning, when Mr. Podsnap put him right again.

"We do not say Ozer; we say Other; the letters are 'T' and 'H;' You say Tay and Aish, You Know;" (still with clemency). "The sound is 'th'—'th!'"

"And other countries," said the foreign gentleman. "They do how?"

"They do, sir," returned Mr. Podsnap, gravely shaking his head; "they do—I am sorry to be obliged to say it—as they do."

"It was a little particular of Providence," said the foreign gentleman, laughing; "for the frontier is not large."

"Undoubtedly," assented Mr. Podsnap; "But So it is. It was the Charter of the Land. This Island was Blest, Sir, to the Direct Exclusion of such Other Countries as—as there may happen to be. And if we were all Englishmen present, I would say," added Mr. Podsnap, looking round upon his compatriots, and sounding solemnly with his theme, "that there is in the Englishman a combination of qualities, a modesty, an independence, a responsibility, a repose, combined with an absence of everything calculated to call a blush into the cheek of a young person, which one would seek in vain among the Nations of the Earth."

Having delivered this little summary, Mr. Podsnap's face flushed as he thought of the remote possibility of its being at all qualified by any prejudiced citizen of any other country; and, with his favorite right-arm flourish, he put the rest of Europe and the whole of Asia, Africa, and America nowhere.

The audience were much edified by this passage of words; and Mr. Podsnap, feeling that he was in rather remarkable force to-day, became smiling and conversational.

"Has anything more been heard, Veneering," he inquired, "of the lucky legatee?"

"Nothing more," returned Veneering, "than that he has

come into possession of the property. I am told people now call him The Golden Dustman. I mentioned to you some time ago, I think, that the young lady whose intended husband was murdered is daughter to a clerk of mine?"

"Yes, you told me that," said Podsnap; "and by-the-bye, I wish you would tell it again here, for it's a curious coincidence—curious that the first news of the discovery should have been brought straight to your table (when I was there), and curious that one of your people should have been so nearly interested in it. Just relate that, will you?"

Veneering was more than ready to do it, for he had prospered exceedingly upon the Harmon Murder, and had turned the social distinction it conferred upon him to the account of making several dozen of bran-new bosom-friends. So, addressing himself to the most desirable of his neighbors, while Mrs. Veneering secured the next most desirable, he plunged into the case, and emerged from it twenty minutes afterwards with a Bank Director in his arms. Then Mrs. Veneering had to relate, to a larger circle, how she had been to see the girl, and how she was really pretty, and (considering her station) presentable.

The Lammles were so fond of the dear Veneerings that they could not for some time detach themselves from these excellent friends; but at length, either a very open smile on Mr. Lammle's part, or a very secret elevation of one of his gingerous eyebrows—certainly one or the other—seemed to say to Mrs. Lammle, "Why don't you play?" And so, looking about her, she saw Miss Podsnap, and seeming to say responsively, "That card?" and to be answered "Yes," went and sat beside Miss Podsnap for the rest of the entertainment.

"We must be going with the rest," observed Mrs. Lammle, rising with a show of unwillingness, amidst a general dispersal. "We are real friends, Georgiana dear?"

"Real."

"Good-night, dear girl!"

She had established an attraction over the shrinking nature upon which her smiling eyes were fixed, for Georgiana held her hand while she answered in a secret and half-frightened tone:

"Don't forget me when you are gone away. And come again soon. Good-night!"

Charming to see Mr. and Mrs. Lammle taking leave so gracefully, and going down the stairs so lovingly and sweetly. Not quite so charming to see their smiling faces fall and brood as they dropped moodily into separate corners of their little carriage.

"Sophronia, are you awake?"

"Am I likely to be asleep, sir?"

"Attend to what I am going to say. Keep close to that idiot girl. Keep her under your thumb. You have her fast, and you are not to let her go. Do you hear?"

"I hear you."

"I foresee there is money to be made out of this, besides taking that fellow down a peg. We owe each other money, you know."

CHAPTER XII.

MR. MORTIMER LIGHTWOOD and Mr. Eugene Wrayburn had taken a coffee-house dinner in Mr. Lightwood's office. They had newly agreed to set up a joint establishment. They had taken a bachelor cottage near Hampton, on the brink of the Thames, with a lawn, and a boat-house, and all things fitting, and were to float with the stream through the summer and a long vacation.

Young Blight was gone, the coffee-house waiter was gone, the plates and dishes were gone, the wine was going—but not in the same direction.

"The wind sounds up here," quoth Eugene, stirring the fire, "as if we were keeping a lighthouse. I wish we were."

"Don't you think it would bore us?" Lightwood asked.

"Not more than any other place. If we were on an isolated rock in a stormy sea," said Eugene, smoking with his eyes on the fire, "Lady Tippins couldn't put off to visit us, or, better still, might put off and get swamped. People couldn't ask one to wedding breakfasts. There would be no Precedents to hammer at, except the plain-sailing Precedent of keeping the light up. It would be exciting to look out for wrecks."

"But otherwise," suggested Lightwood, "there might be a degree of sameness in the life."

"I have thought of that also," said Eugene, "but it would not extend beyond two people. Now, it's a question with me, Mortimer, whether a monotony defined with that precision and limited to that extent, might not be more endurable than the unlimited monotony of one's fellow-creatures."

As Lightwood laughed and passed the wine, he remarked, "We shall have an opportunity, in our boating summer, of trying the question."

"An imperfect one," Eugene acquiesced, with a sigh, "but so we shall. I hope we may not prove too much for one another."

"Now, regarding your respected father," said Lightwood, bringing him to a subject they had expressly appointed to discuss: always the most slippery eel of eels of subjects to lay hold of.

"Yes, regarding my respected father," assented Eugene, settling himself in his arm-chair. "My respected father has found, down the parental neighborhood, a wife for his not-generally-respected son."

"With some money, of course?"

"With some money, of course, or he would not have found her."

"Do you know her?"

"Not in the least."

"Hadn't you better see her?"

"My dear Mortimer, you have studied my character. Could I possibly go down there, labeled 'ELIGIBLE. ON VIEW,' and meet the lady, similarly labeled? Anything to carry out M. R. F.'s arrangements, I am sure, with the greatest pleasure—except matrimony. Could I possibly support it? I, so soon bored, so constantly, so fatally?"

"But you are not a consistent fellow, Eugene."

"In susceptibility to boredom," returned that worthy, "I assure you I am the most consistent of mankind."

It had grown darker as they talked, and the wind was sawing and the sawdust was whirling outside paler windows. The underlying church-yard was already settling into deep dim shade, and the shade was creeping up to the house-

tops among which they sat. "As if," said Eugene, "as if the church-yard ghosts were rising."

He had walked to the window with his cigar in his mouth, to exalt its flavor by comparing the fireside with the outside, when he stopped midway on his return to his arm-chair, and said:

"Apparently one of the ghosts has lost its way, and dropped in to be directed. Look at this phantom!"

Lightwood turned his head, and there, in the darkness of the entry, stood a something in the likeness of a man: to whom he addressed the not irrelevant inquiry, "Who the devil are you?"

"I ask your pardons, Governors," replied the ghost, in a hoarse double-barreled whisper, "but might either on you be Lawyer Lightwood?"

"One of us is," said the owner of that name.

"All right, Governors Both," returned the ghost, carefully closing the room door; "'tickler business."

Mortimer lighted the candles. They showed the visitor to be an ill-looking visitor with a squinting leer, who, as he spoke, fumbled at an old sodden fur cap, formless and mangy, that looked like a furry animal, dog or cat, puppy or kitten, drowned and decaying.

"Now," said Mortimer, "what is it?"

"Governors Both," returned the man, in what he meant to be a wheedling tone, "which on you might be Lawyer Lightwood?"

"I am."

"Lawyer Lightwood," ducking at him with a servile air, "I am a man as gets my living, and as seeks to get my living, by the sweat of my brow. Not to risk being done out of the sweat of my brow, by any chances, I should wish afore going further to be swore in."

"I am not a swearer in of people, man."

The visitor, clearly anything but reliant on this assurance, doggedly muttered "Alfred David."

"Is that your name?" asked Lightwood.

"My name?" returned the man. "No; I want to take a Alfred David."

(Which Eugene, smoking and contemplating him, interpreted as meaning Affidavit.)

"I tell you, my good fellow," said Lightwood, with his indolent laugh, "that I have nothing to do with swearing."

"He can swear *at* you," Eugène explained; "and so can I. But we can't do more for you."

Much discomfited by this information, the visitor turned the drowned dog or cat, puppy or kitten, about and about, and looked from one of the Governors Both to the other of the Governors Both, while he deeply considered within himself. At length he decided:

"Then I must be took down in pen and ink."

"First, let us know what your business is about."

"It's about," said the man, taking a step forward, dropping his hoarse voice, and shading it with his hand, "it's about from five to ten thousand pound reward. That's what it's about. It's about Murder. That's what it's about."

"Come nearer the table. Sit down."

Deferring to the man's sense of the binding powers of pen and ink and paper, Lightwood nodded acceptance of Eugene's nodded proposal to take those spells in hand. Eugene, bringing them to the table, sat down as clerk or notary.

"Now," said Lightwood, "what's your name?"

"Roger Riderhood."

"Dwelling-place?"

"Lime'us Hole."

"Calling or occupation?"

Not quite so glib with this answer as with the previous two, Mr. Riderhood gave in the definition, "Waterside character."

"Anything against you?" Eugene quietly put in, as he wrote.

Rather baulked, Mr. Riderhood evasively remarked, with an innocent air, that he believed the T'other Governor had asked him summa't.

"Ever in trouble?" said Eugene.

"Once." (Might happen to any man, Mr. Riderhood added incidentally.)

"On suspicion of—?"

"Of seaman's pocket," said Mr. Riderhood. "Whereby I was in reality the man's best friend, and tried to take care of him."

"With the sweat of your brow?" asked Eugene.

"Till it poured down like rain," said Roger Riderhood. "Now let me be took down again. I give information that the man that done the Harmon Murder is Gaffer Hexam, the man that found the body. The hand of Jesse Hexam, commonly called Gaffer on the river and along shore, is the hand that done that deed. His hand and no other."

"Tell us on what grounds you make this accusation," said Mortimer Lightwood.

"On the grounds," answered Riderhood, wiping his face with his sleeve, "that I was Gaffer's pardner, and suspected of him many a long day and many a dark night. On the grounds that I knowed his ways. On the grounds that I broke the pardnership because I see the danger; which I warn you his daughter may tell you another story about that, for anythink I can say, but you know what it'll be worth, for she'd tell you lies, the world round and the heavens broad, to save her father. On the grounds that it's well understood along the cause'ays and the stairs that he done it. On the grounds that he's fell off from, because he done it. On the grounds that I will swear he done it. On the grounds that you may take me where you will, and get me sworn to it. I don't want to back out of the consequences. I have made up *my* mind. Take me anywheres."

"All this is nothing," said Lightwood.

"Nothing?" repeated Riderhood.

"Merely nothing. It goes to no more than that you suspect this man of the crime. You may do so with some reason, or you may do so with no reason, but he cannot be convicted on your suspicion."

"Haven't I said from the first minute that I opened my mouth in this here world-without-end-everlasting chair that I was willing to swear that he done it? Haven't I said, Take me and get me sworn to it? Don't I say so now? You won't deny it, Lawyer Lightwood?"

"Surely not; but you only offer to swear to your suspicion, and I tell you it is not enough to swear to your suspicion."

"Not enough, ain't it, Lawyer Lightwood?" he cautiously demanded.

"Positively not."

"And did I say it *was* enough? Now, I appeal to the T'other Governor. Now, fair! Did I say so?"

"He certainly has not said that he had no more to tell," Eugene observed.

"Go on then," said Lightwood. "Say out what you have to say. No after-thought."

"Let me be took down then!" cried the informer, eagerly and anxiously. "Let me be took down, for by George and the Draggin I'm a coming to it now! Don't do nothing to keep back from a honest man the fruits of the sweat of his brow! I give information, then, that he told me that he done it. Is *that* enough?"

"Take care what you say, my friend," said Mortimer.

"Lawyer Lightwood, take care, you, what I say; for I judge you'll be answerable for follering it up!" Then, slowly and emphatically beating it all out with his open right hand on the palm of his left; "I, Roger Riderhood, Lime'us Hole, Waterside character, tell you, Lawyer Lightwood, that the man Jesse Hexam, commonly called upon the river and along shore Gaffer, told me that he done the deed. What's more, he told me with his own lips that he done the deed. What's more, he said that he done the deed. And I'll swear it!"

"Where did he tell you so?"

"Outside the door of the Six Jolly Fellowships, towards a quarter arter twelve o'clock at midnight—but I will not in my conscience undertake to swear to so fine a matter as five minutes—on the night when he picked up the body. The Six Jolly Fellowships stands on the spot still. The Six Jolly Fellowships won't run away. If it turns out that he warn't at the Six Jolly Fellowships that night at midnight, I'm a liar."

"What did he say?"

"I'll tell you (take me down, T'other Governor, I ask no better). He come out first; I come out last. I might be a minute arter him; I might be half a minute, I might be a quarter of a minute; I cannot swear to that and therefore I won't. That's knowing the obligations of a Alfred David, ain't it?"

"Go on."

"I found him a waiting to speak to me. He says to me, 'Rogue Riderhood'—for that's the name I'm mostly called by—not for any meaning in it, for meaning it has none, but because of its being similar to Roger."

"Never mind that."

"Scuse me, Lawyer Lightwood, it's a part of the truth, and as such I do mind it, and I must mind it and I will mind it. 'Rogue Riderhood,' he says, 'words passed betwixt us on the river to-night.' Which they had; ask his daughter! 'I threatened you,' he says, 'to chop you over the fingers with my boat's stretcher, or take a aim at your brains with my boat-hook. I did so on accounts of your looking too hard at what I had in tow, as if you was suspicious, and on accounts of your holding on to the gunwale of my boat.' I says to him, 'Gaffer, I know it.' He says to me, 'Rogue Riderhood, you are a man in a dozen'—I think he said in a score, but of that I am not positive, so take the lowest figure, for precious be the obligations of a Alfred David. 'And,' he says, 'when your fellow-men is up, be it their lives or be it their watches, sharp is ever the word with you. Had you suspicions?' I says, 'Gaffer, I had; and what's more, I have.' He falls a shaking, and he says, 'Of what?' I says, 'Of foul play.' He falls a shaking worse, and he says, 'There *was* foul play then. I done it for his money. Don't betray me!' Those were the words as ever he used."

There was a silence, broken only by the fall of the ashes in the grate.

"What more?" asked Lightwood.

"Of him, d'ye mean, Lawyer Lightwood?"

"Of anything to the purpose."

"Now, I'm blest if I understand you, Governors Both," said the informer, in a creeping manner: propitiating both, though only one had spoken. "What? Ain't *that* enough?"

"Did you ask him how he did it, where he did it, when he did it?"

"Far be it from me, Lawyer Lightwood! I was so troubled in my mind, that I wouldn't have knowed more, nō, not for the sum as I expect to earn from you by the

sweat of my brow, twice told! I had put an end to the pardnership. I had cut the connection. I couldn't undo what was done; and when he begs and prays, 'Old pardner, on my knees, don't split upon me!' I only makes answer 'Never speak another word to Roger Riderhood, nor look him in the face!' and I shuns that man."

"You have been troubled in your mind a long time, man?" said Mortimer.

"Hages!"

"When all that stir was made, when the Government reward was offered, when the police were on the alert, when the whole country rang with the crime!" said Mortimer.

"Hah!" Mr. Riderood very slowly and hoarsely chimed in, "warn't I troubled in my mind then!"

"But he hadn't," said Eugene, drawing a lady's head upon his writing-paper, and touching it at intervals, "the opportunity then of earning so much money, you see."

"The T'other Governor hits the nail, Lawyer Lightwood! It was that as turned me. I had many times and again struggled to relieve myself of the trouble on my mind, but I couldn't get it off. I had once very nigh got it off to Miss Abbey Potterson which keeps the Six Jolly Fellowships—there is the 'ouse, it won't run away,—there lives the lady, she ain't likely to be struck dead afore you get there—ask her!—but I couldn't do it. At last, out comes the new bill with your own lawful name, Lawyer Lightwood, printed to it, and then I asks the question of my own intellects, Am I to have this trouble on my mind for ever? Am I never to throw it off? Am I always to think more of Gaffer than of myself? If he's got a daughter, ain't I got a daughter?"

"And echo answered—" Eugene suggested.

"You have," said Mr. Riderhood, in a firm tone.

"Incidentally mentioning, at the same time, her age?" inquired Eugene.

"Yes, governor. Two-and-twenty last October. And then I put it to myself, 'Regarding the money. It is a pot of money.' For it is a pot," said Mr. Riderhood, with candor, "and why deny it? So I made up my mind to get my trouble off my mind, and to earn by the sweat of my brow what was held out to me. And what's more," he added, suddenly

turning bloodthirsty, "I mean to have it! And now I tell you, once and away, Lawyer Lightwood, that Jesse Hexam, commonly called Gaffer, his hand and no other, done the deed, on his own confession to me. And I give him up to you, and I want him took. This night!"

Lightwood leaned over his friend, and said in a whisper:

"I suppose I must go with this fellow to our imperturbable friend at the police-station."

"I suppose," said Eugene, "there is no help for it."

"Do you believe him?"

"I believe him to be a thorough rascal. But he may tell the truth for his own purpose, and for this occasion only. You mentioned (twice, I think,) a daughter of this Hexam's," said Eugene. "You don't mean to imply that she had any guilty knowledge of the crime?"

The honest man, after considering—perhaps considering how his answer might affect the fruits of the sweat of his brow—replied, unreservedly, "No, I don't."

"And you implicate no other person?"

"It ain't what I implicate, it's what Gaffer implicated," was the dogged and determined answer. "I don't pretend to know more than that his words to me was, 'I done it.' Those was his words."

"I must see this out, Mortimer," whispered Eugene, rising. "How shall we go?"

"Let us walk," whispered Lightwood, "and give this fellow time to think of it."

Rogue Riderhood led the way until they came to the police-station. Mr. Inspector recognized the friends the instant they reappeared.

Mortimer Lightwood asked him, would he be so good as to look at those notes? Handing him Eugene's.

"Have you heard these read?" he then demanded of the honest man.

"No," said Riderhood.

"Then you had better hear them." And so read them aloud, in an official manner.

"Are these notes correct, now, as to the information you bring here and the evidence you mean to give?" he asked, when he had finished reading.

"They are. They are as correct," returned Mr. Riderhood, "as I am. I can't say more than that for 'em."

"I'll take this man, myself, sir," said Mr. Inspector to Lightwood. Then to Riderhood, "Is he at home? Where is he? What's he doing? Make it your business to know all about him."

Riderhood promised to find out in a few minutes.

"Stop," said Mr. Inspector; "not till I tell you. We mustn't look like business. Would you two gentlemen object to making a pretense of taking a glass of something in my company at the Fellowships? You can't do better than be interested in some lime works anywhere down about Northfleet, and doubtful whether some of your lime don't get into bad company as it comes up in barges."

"You hear, Eugene," said Lightwood over his shoulder. "You are deeply interested in lime."

"Without lime," returned that unmoved barrister-at-law, "my existence would be unilluminated by a ray of hope."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE two lime merchants, with their escort, entered the dominions of Miss Abbey Potterson.

"Speaking as a shipper of lime," began Eugene, "I beg to observe that if this missing lime could be got hold of without any young female relative of any distinguished gentleman engaged in the lime trade (which I cherish next to my life) being present, I think it might be a more agreeable proceeding to the assisting bystanders, that is to say, lime-burners."

"I also," said Lightwood, pushing his friend aside with a laugh, "should much prefer that."

"It shall be done, gentlemen, if it can be done conveniently," said Mr. Inspector, with coolness. "There is no wish on my part to cause any distress in that quarter. Indeed, I am sorry for that quarter."

"There was a boy in that quarter," remarked Eugene. "He is still there?"

"No," said Mr. Inspector. "He has quitted those works. He is otherwise disposed of."

"Will she be left alone then?" asked Eugene.

"She will be left," said Mr. Inspector, "alone."

Two taps were now heard on the outside of the window. Mr. Inspector strolled out with a noiseless foot and an unoccupied countenance. As one might go to survey the weather and the general aspect of the heavenly bodies.

"This is becoming grim, Mortimer," said Eugene, in a low voice. "I don't like this."

"Nor I," said Lightwood. "Shall we go?"

"Being here, let us stay. You ought to see it out, and I won't leave you. Besides, that lonely girl with the dark hair runs in my head. It was little more than a glimpse we had of her that last time, and yet I almost see her waiting by the fire to-night. Do you feel like a dark combination of traitor and pickpocket when you think of that girl?"

"Rather," returned Lightwood. "Do you?"

"Very much so."

Their escort strolled back again, and reported. Divested of its various lime-lights and shadows, his report went to the effect that Gaffer was away in his boat, supposed to be on his old look-out; that he had been expected last high water; that having missed it for some reason or other, he was not, according to his usual habits at night, to be counted on before next high water, or it might be an hour or so later; that his daughter, surveyed through the window, would seem to be so expecting him, for the supper was not cooking, but set out ready to be cooked; that it would be high water at about one, and that it was now barely ten; that there was nothing to be done but watch and wait; that the informer was keeping watch at the instant of that present reporting, but that two heads were better than one (especially when the second was Mr. Inspector's); and that the reporter meant to share the watch. And forasmuch as crouching under the lee of a hauled-up boat on a night when it blew cold and strong, and when the weather was varied with blasts of hail at times, might be wearisome to amateurs, the reporter closed with the recommendation that the two gentlemen should remain, for a while at any rate, in their present quarters, which were weather-tight and warm.

They were not inclined to dispute this recommendation, but they wanted to know where they could join the watch-

ers when so disposed. Rather than trust to a verbal description of the place, which might mislead, Eugene (with a less weighty sense of personal trouble on him than he usually had) would go out with Mr. Inspector, note the spot, and come back.

On the shelving bank of the river, among the slimy stones of a causeway—very near to the old windmill which was the denounced man's dwelling-place—were a few boats; some moored and already beginning to float; others, hauled up above the reach of the tide. Under one of these latter, Eugene's companion disappeared. And when Eugene had made sure that he could not miss it, he turned his eyes upon the building where, as he had been told, the lonely girl with the dark hair sat by the fire.

That part of the bank having rank grass growing on it, there was no difficulty in getting close, without any noise of footsteps: it was but to scramble up a ragged face of pretty hard mud three or four feet high and come upon the grass and to the window. He came to the window by that means.

She had no other light than the light of the fire. The unkindled lamp stood on the table. She sat on the ground, looking at the brazier, with her face leaning on her hand. There was a kind of film or flicker on her face, which at first he took to be the fitful firelight; but, on a second look, he saw that she was weeping. A sad and solitary spectacle, as shown him by the rising and the falling of the fire. A deep rich piece of color, with the brown flush of her cheek and the shining lustre of her hair, though sad and solitary, weeping by the rising and the falling of the fire.

She started up. He had been so very still, that he felt sure it was not he who had disturbed her, so merely withdrew from the window and stood near it in the shadow of the wall. She opened the door, and said in an alarmed tone, "Father, was that you calling me?" And again, "Father!" And once again, after listening, "Father! I thought I heard you call me twice before!"

No response. As she re-entered the door, he dropped over the bank and made his way back, among the ooze and near the hiding-place, to Mortimer Lightwood: to whom he told what he had seen of the girl, and how this was becoming very grim indeed.

"If the real man feels as guilty as I do," said Eugene, "he is remarkably uncomfortable."

"Influence of secrecy," suggested Lightwood.

"I am not at all obliged to it for making me Guy Fawkes in the vault and a Sneak in the area both at once," said Eugene. "Give me some more of that stuff."

Lightwood helped him to some more of that stuff, but it had been cooling, and didn't answer now.

"Pooh," said Eugene, spitting it out among the ashes. "Tastes like the wash of the river."

"Are you so familiar with the flavor of the wash of the river?"

"I seem to be to-night. I feel as if I had been half drowned, and swallowed a gallon of it."

"Influence of locality," suggested Lightwood.

"You are mighty learned to-night, you and your influences," returned Eugene. "How long shall we stay here?"

"How long do you think?"

"If I could choose, I should say a minute," replied Eugene, "for the Jolly Fellowship Porters are not the jolliest dogs I have known. But I suppose we are best here until they turn us out with the other suspicious characters, at midnight."

Thereupon he stirred the fire, and sat down on one side of it. It struck eleven, and he made believe to compose himself patiently. But gradually he took the fidgets in one leg, and then in the other leg, and then in one arm, and then in the other arm, and then in his chin, and then in his back, and then in his forehead, and then in his hair, and then in his nose; and then he stretched himself recumbent on two chairs, and groaned; and then he started up.

"Invisible insects of diabolical activity swarm in this place. I am tickled and twitched all over. Mentally, I have now committed a burglary under the meanest circumstances, and the myrmidons of justice are at my heels."

"I am quite as bad," said Lightwood, sitting up facing him, with a tumbled head, after going through some wonderful evolutions, in which his head had been the lowest part of him. "This restlessness began with me long ago. All the time you were out I felt like Gulliver with the Lilliputians firing upon him."

"It won't do, Mortimer. We must get into the air; we must join our dear friend and brother, Riderhood. And let us tranquilize ourselves by making a compact. Next time (with a view to our peace of mind) we'll commit the crime, instead of taking the criminal. You swear it?"

"Certainly."

"Sworn! Let Tippins look to it. Her life's in danger. Come to our honest friend."

He led him to the post of watch, and they both dropped down and crept under the lee of the boat; a better shelter than it had seemed before, being directly contrasted with the blowing wind and the bare night.

"Mr. Inspector at home?" whispered Eugene.

"Here I am, sir."

"And our friend of the perspiring brow is at the far corner there? Good. Anything happened?"

"His daughter has been out, thinking she heard him calling, unless it was a sign to him to keep out of the way. It might have been."

"It might have been Rule Britannia," muttered Eugene, "but it wasn't. Mortimer."

"Here!" (On the other side of Mr. Inspector.)

"Two burglaries now, and a forgery!"

Bells to windward told them of its being One—Two—Three. As the time passed, this slinking business became a more and more precarious one. It would seem as if the man had had some intimation of what was in hand against him, or had taken fright! His movements might have been planned to gain for him, in getting beyond their reach, twelve hours' advantage. The honest man who had expended the sweat of his brow became uneasy, and began to complain with bitterness of the proneness of mankind to cheat him—him invested with the dignity of Labor!

Their retreat was so chosen that while they could watch the river, they could watch the house. No one had passed in or out, since the daughter thought she heard the father calling. No one could pass in or out without being seen.

"But it will be light at five," said Mr. Inspector, "and then *we* shall be seen."

"Look here," said Riderhood, "what do you say to this?"

He may have been lurking in and out, and just holding his own betwixt two or three bridges, for hours back. My boat's among them boats here at the cause'ay. I'll put off in her and take a look around. I know his ways, and the like-ly nooks he favors."

Eugene had raised himself on his elbow to look into the darkness after him. "I wish the boat of my honorable and gallant friend," he murmured, lying down again and speaking into his hat, "may be endowed with philanthropy enough to turn bottom-upward and extinguish him!—Mortimer."

"My honorable friend."

"Three burglaries, two forgeries, and a midnight assassination."

More than an hour had passed, and they were even dozing, when one of them—each said it was he, and he had *not* dozed—made out Riderhood in his boat at the spot agreed on. They sprang up, came out from their shelter, and went down to him. When he saw them coming he dropped alongside the causeway; so that they, standing on the causeway, could speak with him in whispers, under the shadowy mass of the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters fast asleep.

"Blest if I can make it out!" said he, staring at them.

"Make what out? Have you seen him?"

"No."

"What *have* you seen?" asked Lightwood. For he was staring at them in the strangest way.

"I've seen his boat."

"Not empty?"

"Yes, empty. And what's more,—adrift. And what's more,—with one scull gone. And what's more,—with t'other scull jammed in the thowels and broke short off. And what's more—the boat's drove tight by the tide, 'atwixt two tiers of barges. And what's more,—he's in luck again, by George if he ain't!"

CHAPTER XIV.

AS if with one accord, they all turned their eyes towards the light of the fire shining through the window. It

was fainter and duller. Perhaps fire, like the higher animal and vegetable life it helps to sustain, has its greatest tendency towards death when the night is dying and the day is not yet born.

"If it was me that had the law of this here job in hand," growled Riderhood, with a threatening shake of his head, "blest if I wouldn't lay hold of *her*, at any rate!"

"Ay, but it is not you," said Eugene, with something so suddenly fierce in him that the informer returned submissively: "Well, well, well, T'other Governor, I didn't say it was. A man may speak."

"And vermin may be silent," said Eugene. "Hold your tongue, you water-rat!"

Astonished by his friend's unusual heat, Lightwood stared too, and then said: "What can have become of this man?"

"Can't imagine. Unless he dived overboard." The informer wiped his brow ruefully as he said it, sitting in his boat and always staring disconsolate.

"Did you make his boat fast?"

"She's fast enough till the tide runs back. I couldn't make her faster than she is. Come aboard of mine, and see for your own selves."

"Hallo! Steady!" cried Eugene, as they bumped heavily against a pile; and then in a lower voice ("I wish the boat of my honorable and gallant friend may be endowed with philanthropy enough *not* to turn bottom-upward and extinguish us!) Steady, steady! Sit close, Mortimer. Here's the hail again. See how it flies, like a troop of wild cats, at Mr. Riderhood's eyes!"

They glided slowly on, keeping under the shore and sneaking in and out among the shipping by back-alleys of water, for a half-hour, when Riderhood unshipped his sculls, stood holding on to a barge, and hand over hand longwise along the barge's side, gradually worked his boat under her head into a secret little nook of scummy water. Driven into that nook, wedged as he had described, was Gaffer's boat; that boat with the stain still in it, bearing some resemblance to a muffled human form.

"This is Hexam's boat," said Mr. Inspector. "I know her well."

"And see now!" added Riderhood, creeping aft, and showing a stretched rope made fast there and towing over-board. "Didn't I tell you he was in luck again?"

"Haul in," said Mr. Inspector.

"Easy to say haul in," answered Riderhood. "Not so easy done. His luck's got fouled under the keels of the barges. I tried to haul in last time, but I couldn't. See how taut the line is?"

"I must have it up," said Mr. Inspector.

After certain minutes, and a few directions to the rest to "ease her a little for'ard," and "now ease her a trifle aft," and the like, he said composedly, "All clear!" and the line and the boat came free together.

"Now," said Mr. Inspector again to Riderhood, when they were all on the slushy stones; "you have had more practice in this than I have had, and ought to be better at it. Undo the tow-rope, and we'll help you haul in."

Riderhood got into the boat accordingly. It appeared as if he had scarcely had a moment's time to touch the rope or look over the stern, when he came scrambling back, as pale as the morning, and gasped out:

"By the Lord, he's done me!"

"What do you mean?" they all demanded.

He pointed behind him at the boat, and gasped to that degree that he dropped upon the stones to get his breath.

"Gaffer's done me. It's Gaffer!"

They ran to the rope, leaving him gasping there. Soon, the form of the bird of prey, dead some hours, lay stretched upon the shore, with a new blast storming at it and clotting the wet hair with hailstones.

"Now see," said Mr. Inspector, after mature deliberation, kneeling on one knee beside the body, "see how it works round upon him. It's a wild tempestuous evening when this man that was," stooping to wipe some hailstones out of his hair with an end of his own drowned jacket, "—there! Now he's more like himself, though he's badly bruised—when this man that was, rows out upon the river on his usual lay. He carries with him this coil of rope. He was a light-dresser was this man, you see?—and when it was wet or freezing, or blew cold, he would hang this coil of line round

his neck. Last evening he does this. Worse for him! He dodges about in his boat, does this man, till he gets chilled. His hands," taking up one of them, which dropped like a leaden weight, "get numbed. He sees some object that's in his way of business, floating. He makes ready to secure that object. He unwinds the end of his coil that he wants to take some turns on in his boat, and he takes turns enough on it to secure that it shan't run out. He makes it too secure, as it happens. His object drifts up, before he is quite ready for it. He catches at it, thinks he'll make sure of the contents of the pockets anyhow, bends right over the stern, and in one of these heavy squalls, or in the cross-swell of two steamers, or in not being quite prepared, or through all or most or some, gets a lurch, overbalances and goes headforemost overboard. Now see! He can swim, can this man; and instantly he strikes out. But in such striking-out he tangles his arms, pulls strong on the slip-knot, and it runs home. The object he had expected to take in tow, floats by, and his own boat tows him dead, to where we found him, all entangled in his own line. You'll ask me how I make it out about the pockets? First, I'll tell you more; there was silver in 'em. How do I make that out? Simple and satisfactory. Because he's got it here." The lecturer held up the tightly clenched right hand.

"What is to be done with the remains?" asked Lightwood.

"If you wouldn't object to standing by him half a minute, sir," was the reply, "I'll find the nearest of our men to come and take charge of him."

"Eugene," said Lightwood—and was about to add, "we may wait at a little distance," when turning his head he found that no Eugene was there. He raised his voice and called "Eugene! Holloa!" But no Eugene replied.

It was broad daylight now, and he looked about. But no Eugene was in all the view.

Mr. Inspector speedily returning down the wooden stairs, with a police constable, Lightwood asked him if he had seen his friend leave them? Mr. Inspector could not exactly say that he had seen him go, but had noticed that he was restless.

"Singular and entertaining combination, sir, your friend."

"I wish it had not been a part of his singular and entertaining combination to give me the slip under these dreary circumstances at this time of the morning," said Lightwood. "Can we get anything hot to drink?"

We could, and we did, in a public-house kitchen.

As Mortimer Lightwood sat before the blazing fire, conscious of drinking brandy and water then and there in his sleep, and yet at one and the same time drinking burnt sherry at the Six Jolly Fellowships, and lying under the boat on the river shore, and sitting in the boat that Riderhood rowed, and having to dine in the Temple with an unknown man, who described himself as M. R. F. Eugene Gaffer Harmon, and said he lived at Hailstorm,—as he passed through these curious vicissitudes of fatigue and slumber, arranged upon a scale of a dozen hours to the second, he became aware of hearing, in a mist through which Mr. Inspector loomed vague and large, that that officer took upon himself to prepare the dead man's daughter for what had befallen in the night, and generally that he took everything upon himself, and he, Lightwood, stumbled in his sleep to a cabstand, called a cab, and had entered the army and committed a capital military offense and been tried by court-martial and found guilty and had arranged his affairs and been marched out to be shot, before his door banged.

The night's work had so exhausted and worn out this actor in it, that he had become a mere somnambulist. He was too tired to rest in his sleep, until he was even tired out of being too tired, and dropped into oblivion. Late in the afternoon he awoke, and in some anxiety sent round to Eugene's lodging hard by, to inquire if he were up yet?

Oh yes, he was up. In fact, he had not been to bed. He had just come home. And here he was, close following on the heels of the message.

"Why, what bloodshot, draggled, disheveled spectacle is this!" cried Mortimer.

"Are my feathers so very much rumped?" said Eugene, coolly going up to the looking-glass. "They *are* rather out of sorts. But consider. Such a night for plumage!"

"Such a night!" repeated Mortimer. "What became of you in the morning?"

"My dear fellow," said Eugene, sitting on his bed, "I felt that we had bored one another so long, that an unbroken continuance of those relations must inevitably terminate in our flying to opposite points of the earth. I also felt that I had committed every crime in the Newgate Calendar. So, for mingled considerations of friendship and felony, I took a walk."

CHAPTER XV.

MR. AND MRS. BOFFIN sat after breakfast, in the Bower, a prey to prosperity. Mr. Boffin's face denoted care and complication. Many disordered papers were before him, and he looked at them about as hopefully as an innocent civilian might look at a crowd of troops whom he was required at five minutes' notice to manœuvre and review.

Mr. Boffin was in such severe literary difficulties that his eyes were prominent and fixed, and his breathing was stertorous, when, to the great relief of Mrs Boffin, who observed these symptoms with alarm, the yard bell rang.

The hammer-headed young man announced "Mr. Rokesmith."

"Oh!" said Mr. Boffin. "Oh indeed! Our and the Wilfers' Mutual Friend, my dear. Ask him to come in."

Mr. Rokesmith appeared.

"Sit down, sir," said Mr. Boffin, shaking hands with him. "Mrs. Boffin you're already acquainted with. Well, sir, I am rather unprepared to see you, for, to tell you the truth, I've been so busy with one thing and another, that I've not had time to turn your offer over."

"That's apology for both of us: for Mr. Boffin, and for me as well," said the smiling Mrs. Boffin. "But Lor'! we can talk it over now; can't us?"

Mr. Rokesmith bowed, thanked her, and said he hoped so.

"Let me see then," resumed Mr. Boffin, with his hand to his chin. "It was Secretary that you named; wasn't it?"

"I said Secretary," assented Mr. Rokesmith.

"It rather puzzled me at the time," said Mr. Boffin, "and it rather puzzled me and Mrs. Boffin when we spoke of it af-

terwards, because (not to make a mystery of our belief) we have always believed a Secretary to be a piece of furniture, mostly of mahogany, lined with green baize or leather, with a lot of little drawers in it. Now, you won't think that I take a liberty when I mention that you certainly ain't *that*."

"Certainly not," said Mr. Rokesmith. But he had used the word in the sense of Steward.

"Why, as to Steward, you see," returned Mr. Boffin, with his hand still to his chin, "the odds are that Mrs. Boffin and me may never go upon the water. Being both bad sailors, we should want a Steward if we did; but there's generally one provided."

Mr. Rokesmith again explained; defining the duties he sought to undertake, as those of general superintendent, or manager, or over-looker, or man of business.

"Now, for instance—come!" said Mr. Boffin, in his pouncing way. "If you entered my employment what would you do?"

"I would keep exact accounts of all the expenditure you sanctioned, Mr. Boffin. I would write your letters, under your directions. I would transact your business with people in your pay or employment. I would," with a glance and a half-smile at the table, "arrange your papers—"

Mr. Boffin rubbed his inky ear and looked at his wife.

"I tell you what," said Mr. Boffin, slowly crumpling his own blotted note in his hand; "if you'll turn to at these present papers, and see what you can make of 'em, I shall know better what I can make of you."

No sooner said than done.

"Apple-pie order!" said Mr. Boffin. "And whatever you do with your ink, *I* can't think, for you're as clean as a whistle after it. Now, as to a letter. Let's," said Mr. Boffin, rubbing his hands in his pleasantly childish admiration, "let's try a letter next."

"To whom shall it be addressed, Mr. Boffin?"

"Any one. Yourself."

Mr. Rokesmith quickly wrote, and then read aloud:

"Mr. Boffin presents his compliments to Mr. John Rokesmith, and begs to say that he has decided on giving Mr. John Rokesmith a trial in the capacity he desires to fill. Mr. Bof-

fin takes Mr. John Rokesmith at his word, in postponing to some indefinite period, the consideration of salary. It is quite understood that Mr. Boffin is in no way committed on that point. Mr. Boffin has merely to add, that he relies on Mr. John Rokesmith's assurance that he will be faithful and serviceable. Mr. John Rokesmith will please enter on his duties immediately."

"Well! Now, Noddy!" cried Mrs. Boffin, clapping her hands, "That is a good one!"

Mr. Boffin was no less delighted; indeed, in his own bosom, he regarded both the composition itself and the device that had given birth to it, as a very remarkable monument of human ingenuity.

"And I tell you, my deary," said Mrs. Boffin, "that if you don't close with Mr. Rokesmith now at once, and if you ever go a muddling yourself again with things never meant nor made for you, you'll have an apoplexy—besides iron-moulding your linen—and you'll break my heart."

Mr. Boffin embraced his spouse for these words of wisdom, and then, congratulating John Rokesmith on the brilliancy of his achievements, gave him his hand in pledge of their new relations. So did Mrs. Boffin.

"Now," said Mr. Boffin, "you must be let a little more into our affairs, Rokesmith. I mentioned to you, when I made your acquaintance, or I might better say when you made mine, that Mrs. Boffin's inclinations was setting in the way of Fashion, but that I didn't know how fashionable we might or might not grow. Well! Mrs. Boffin has carried the day, and we're going in neck and crop for Fashion. The fact is, my literary man named to me that a house with which he is, as I may say, connected, had a board up, 'This Eminently Aristocratic Mansion to be let or sold.' Me and Mrs. Boffin went to look at it, and finding it beyond a doubt Eminently Aristocratic (though a trifle high and dull, which after all may be part of the same thing) took it. Rokesmith, what shall we say about your living in the house?"

"In this house?"

"No, no. I have got other plans for this house. In the new house?"

"That will be as you please, Mr. Boffin. I hold myself quite at your disposal. You know where I live at present."

"Well!" said Mr. Boffin, after considering the point; "suppose you keep as you are for the present, and we'll decide by-and-by. You'll begin to take charge at once of all that's going on in the new house, will you?"

"Most willingly. I will begin this very day. Will you give me the address?"

Mr. Boffin repeated it, and the Secretary wrote it down in his pocket-book. Mrs. Boffin took the opportunity of his being so engaged, to get a better observation of his face than she had yet taken. It impressed her in his favor, for she nodded aside to Mr. Boffin, "I like him."

"I will see directly that everything is in train, Mr. Boffin," said the Secretary; and so withdrew.

"Now," said Mr. Boffin to himself, subsiding into his regular series of turns in the yard, "if I can make it comfortable with Wegg, my affairs will be going smooth."

The man of low cunning had, of course, acquired a mastery over the man of high simplicity. The mean man had, of course, got the better of the generous man.

For these reasons Mr. Boffin passed but anxious hours until evening came, and with it Mr. Wegg, stumping leisurely to the Roman Empire. At about this period Mr. Boffin had become profoundly interested in the fortunes of a great military leader known to him as Bully Sawyers, but perhaps better known to fame and easier of identification by the classical student under the less Britannic name of Belisarius. Even this general's career paled in interest for Mr. Boffin before the clearing of his conscience with Wegg; and hence, when that literary gentleman had according to custom eaten and drunk until he was all a-glow, and when he took up his book with the usual introduction, "And now, Mr. Boffin, sir, we'll decline and we'll fall!" Mr. Boffin stopped him.

"You remember, Wegg, when I first told you that I wanted to make a sort of offer to you? I have got another offer to make you, and I hope you'll like it."

"Thank you, sir," returned that reticent individual. "I hope it may prove so."

"What do you think," said Mr. Boffin, "of not keeping a stall, Wegg?"

"I think, sir," replied Wegg, "that I should like to be shown the gentleman prepared to make it worth my while!"

"Here he is," said Mr. Boffin.

Mr. Wegg was going to say, My Benefactor, and had said My Bene, when a grandiloquent change came over him.

"No, Mr. Boffin, not you, sir. Anybody but you. Do not fear, Mr. Boffin, that I shall contaminate the premises which your gold has bought, with *my* lowly pursuits. I am aware, sir, that it would not become me to carry on my little traffic under the windows of your mansion. I have already thought of that, and taken my measures. No need to be bought out, sir. Would Stepney Fields be considered intrusive? If not remote enough, I can go remoter. In the words of the poet's song, which I do not quite remember:

Thrown on the wide world, doom'd to wander and roam,
Bereft of my parents, bereft of a home,
A stranger to something and what's his name joy,
Behold little Edmund the poor Peasant boy.

—And equally," said he, repairing the want of direct application in the last line, "behold myself on a similar footing!"

"Now, Wegg, Wegg, Wegg," remonstrated the excellent Boffin. "You are too sensitive. Hear me out, Wegg. You have taken it into your head that I mean to pension you off."

"True, sir," returned Wegg.

"But I *don't* mean it."

The assurance seemed hardly as comforting to Mr. Wegg, as Mr. Boffin intended it to be. Indeed, an appreciable elongation of his visage might have been observed as he replied:

"Don't you indeed, sir?"

"No," pursued Mr. Boffin; "because that would express, as I understand it, that you were not going to do anything to deserve your money. But you are; you are."

"That, sir," replied Mr. Wegg, cheering up bravely, "is quite another pair of shoes. Now my independence as a man is again elevated. Now I no longer

Weep for the hour,
When to Boffinses bower,
The Lord of the valley with offers came;
Neither does the moon hide her light
From the heavens to-night,
And weep behind her clouds o'er any individual in the present
Company's shame.

—Please to proceed, Mr. Boffin."

"Thank'ee, Wegg, both for your confidence in me and for your frequent dropping into poetry; both of which is friendly. Well, then; my idea is, that you should give up your stall, and that I should put you into the Bower here, to keep it for us. It's a pleasant spot; and a man with coals and candles and a pound a week might be in clover here."

"Hem! Would that man, sir—we will say that man, for the purposes of arguement—be expected to throw any other capacity in, or would any other capacity be considered extra? Now let us suppose that man to be engaged as a reader: say in the evening. Would that man's pay as a reader in the evening, be added to the other amount, which, adopting your language, we will call clover; or would it emerge into that amount, or clover?"

"Well," said Mr. Boffin, "I suppose it would be added."

"I suppose it would, sir. You are right, sir. Exactly my own views, Mr. Boffin." Here Wegg rose, and balancing himself on his wooden leg, fluttered over his prey with extended hand. "Mr. Boffin, consider it done. Say no more, sir, not a word more. My stall and I are forever parted.

Then farewell my trim-built wherry,
Oars and coat and badge farewell!
Never more at Chelsea Ferry,
Shall your Thomas take a spell!"

Mr. Wegg resumed his spectacles therefore. But Sawyers was not to be of the party that night; for, before Wegg had found his place, Mrs. Boffin's tread was heard upon the stairs, so unusually heavy and hurried, that Mr. Boffin would have started up at the sound, anticipating some occurrence much out of the common course, even though she had not also called to him in an agitated tone.

Mr. Boffin hurried out, and found her on the dark staircase, panting, with a lighted candle in her hand.

"What's the matter, my dear?"

"I don't know; I don't know; but I wish you'd come up-stairs."

Much surprised, Mr. Boffin went up-stairs and accompanied Mrs. Boffin into their own room.

"What is it, my dear? Why, you're frightened! *You* frightened?"

"I am not one of that sort, certainly," said Mrs. Boffin, as she sat down in a chair to recover herself, and took her husband's arm; "but it's very strange!"

"What is, my dear?"

"Noddy, the faces of the old man and the two children are all over the house to-night."

"My dear?" exclaimed Mr. Boffin. But not without a certain uncomfortable sensation gliding down his back.

"I know it must sound foolish, and yet it is so."

"Where did you think you saw them?"

"I don't know that I think I saw them anywhere. I felt them."

"Touched them?"

"No. Felt them in the air. I was sorting those things on the chest, and not thinking of the old man or the children, but singing to myself, when all in a moment I felt there was a face growing out of the dark. For a moment it was the old man's, and then it got younger. For a moment it was both the children's, and then it got older. For a moment it was a strange face, and then it was all the faces. I thought I'd try another room, and shake it off. I says to myself, 'I'll go and walk slowly up and down the old man's room three times, from end to end, and then I shall have conquered it.' I went in with the candle in my hand; but the moment I came near the bed, the air got thick with them."

"With the faces?"

"Yes, and I even felt they were in the dark behind the side-door, and on the little staircase, floating away into the yard. Then I called you."

Mr. Boffin, lost in amazement, looked at Mrs. Boffin. Mrs. Boffin, lost in her own fluttered inability to make this out, looked at Mr. Boffin.

"I think, my dear," said the Golden Dustman, "I'll at once get rid of Wegg for the night, because he's coming to inhabit the Bower, and it might be put into his head, or somebody else's, if he heard this and it got about, that the house is haunted. Whereas we know better. Don't we?"

"I never had the feeling in the house before," said Mrs. Boffin.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE Secretary lost no time in getting to work, and his vigilance and method soon set their mark on the Golden Dustman's affairs.

As on the Secretary's face there was a nameless cloud, so on his manner there was a shadow equally indefinable. It was not that he was embarrassed, as on that first night with the Wilfer family; he was habitually unembarrassed now, and yet the something remained. It was not that his manner was bad, as on that occasion; it was now very good, as being modest, gracious, and ready.

He established a temporary office for himself in the new house, and all went on well under his hand, with one singular exception. He manifestly objected to communicate with Mr. Boffin's solicitor. Two or three times, when there was some slight occasion for his doing so, he transferred the task to Mr. Boffin.

Among his first occupations the pursuit of that orphan wanted by Mrs. Boffin held a conspicuous place.

At length, tidings were received by the Reverend Frank Milvey of a charming orphan to be found at Brentford.

The Secretary proposed to Mrs. Boffin to drive her down, that she might at once form her own opinion.

The abode of Mrs. Betty Higden was not easy to find, but after many inquiries and defeats, there was pointed out to them in a lane, a very small cottage residence, with a board across the open doorway, hooked on to which board by the armpits was a young gentleman of tender years, angling for mud with a headless wooden horse and line. In this young sportsman, distinguished by a crisply curling auburn head and a bluff countenance, the Secretary descried the orphan.

It was a small home with a large mangle in it, at the handle of which machine stood a very long boy, with a very little head, and an open mouth of disproportionate capacity that seemed to assist his eyes in staring at the visitors. In a corner below the mangle, on a couple of stools, sat two very little children; a boy and a girl; and when the very long boy, in an interval of staring, took a turn at the mangle, it

was alarming to see how it lunged itself at those two innocents, like a catapult designed for their destruction, harmlessly retiring when within an inch of their heads. The room was clean and neat, but it was easy to see that its occupant was poor.

She was one of those old women, was Mrs. Betty Higden, who by dint of an indomitable purpose and a strong constitution fight out many years, though each year has come with its new knock-down blows fresh to the fight against her, wearied by it; an active old woman, with a bright dark eye and a resolute face, yet quite a tender creature too; not a logically-reasoning woman, but God is good, and hearts may count in Heaven as high as heads.

"Yes sure!" said she, when the business was opened, "Mrs. Milvey had the kindness to write to me, ma'am, and I got Sloppy to read it. It was a pretty letter. But she's an affable lady."

The visitors glanced at the long boy, who seemed to indicate by a broader stare of his mouth and eyes that in him Sloppy stood confessed.

"For I ain't, you must know," said Betty, "much of a hand at reading writing-hand, though I can read my Bible and most print. And I do love a newspaper. You mightn't think it, but Sloppy is a beautiful reader of a newspaper. He do the Police in different voices."

"Is that the dear child in your lap?" said Mrs. Boffin.

"Yes, ma'am, this is Johnny."

"Johnny, too!" cried Mrs. Boffin, turning to the Secretary; "already Johnny! Only one of the two names left to give him! He's a pretty boy."

"Yes, ma'am, he's a pretty boy, he's a dear darling boy, he's the child of my own last left daughter's daughter. But she's gone the way of all the rest."

"Those are not his brother and sister?" said Mrs. Boffin.

"Oh, dear no, ma'am. Those are Minders."

"Minders?" the Secretary repeated.

"Left to be Minded, sir. I keep a Minding-school. I can take only three, on account of the Mangle. But I love children, and Four-pence a week is Four-pence. Come here, Toddles and Poddles."

Toddles was the pet-name of the boy; Poddles of the girl.

"And Master—or Mister—Sloppy?" said the Secretary, in doubt whether he was man, boy, or what.

"A love-child," returned Betty Higden, dropping her voice; "parents never known; found in the street. He was brought up in the—" with a shiver of repugnance, "—the House."

"The Poor-house?" said the Secretary.

Mrs. Higden set that resolute old face of hers, and darkly nodded yes.

"You dislike the mention of it."

"Dislike the mention of it? Kill me sooner than take me there. Throw this pretty child under cart-horses' feet and a loaded wagon, sooner than take him there. Come to us and find us all a-dying, and set a light to us all where we lie, and let us all blaze away with the house into a heap of cinders, sooner than move a corpse of us there!"

"And does he work for you?" asked the Secretary, gently bringing the discourse back to Master or Mister Sloppy.

"Yes," said Betty with a good-humored smile and nod of the head. "And well too."

"Does he live here?"

"More here than anywhere. He was thought to be no better than a Natural, and first come to me as a Minder."

"Is he called by his right name?"

"Why you see, speaking quite correctly, he has no right name. I always understood he took his name from being found on a Sloppy night."

"He seems an amiable fellow."

"Bless you, sir, there's not a bit of him," returned Betty, "that's not amiable. So you may judge how amiable he is, by running your eye along his heighth."

Of an ungainly make was Sloppy. Too much of him longwise, too little of him broadwise, and too many sharp angles of him angle-wise. One of those shambling male human creatures, born to be indiscreetly candid in the revelation of buttons; every button he had about him glaring at the public to a quite preternatural extent. A considerable capital of knee and elbow and wrist and ankle, had Sloppy, and he

didn't know how to dispose of it to the best advantage, but was always investing it in wrong securities, and so getting himself into embarrassed circumstances. Full-Private Number One in the Awkward Squad of the rank and file of life, was Sloppy, and yet had his glimmering notions of standing true to the Colors.

"And now," said Mrs. Boffin, "concerning Johnny. If you trust the dear child to me, he shall have the best of homes, the best of care, the best of education, the best of friends. Please God, I will be a true good mother to him!"

"I am thankful to you, ma'am, and the dear child would be thankful if he was old enough to understand. I wouldn't stand in the dear child's light, not if I had all my life before me instead of a very little of it. But I hope you won't take it ill that I cleave to the child closer than words can tell, for he's the last living thing left me. I have seen so many of them on my lap. And they are all gone but this one! I am ashamed to seem so selfish, but I don't really mean it. It'll be the making of his fortune, and he'll be a gentleman when I am dead. I—I—don't know what comes over me. I—try against it. Don't notice me!" The resolute mouth gave way, and the fine strong old face broke up into weakness and tears.

"There, there, there!" said Mrs. Boffin, almost regarding her kind self as the most ruthless of women. "Nothing is going to be done. Nobody need be frightened. We're all comfortable; ain't we, Mrs. Higden?"

"Sure and certain we are," returned Betty.

"And there really is no hurry, you know," said Mrs. Boffin in a lower voice. "Take time to think of it, my good creature!"

"Don't you fear *me* no more, ma'am," said Betty; "I thought of it for good yesterday. I don't know what come over me just now, but it'll never come again."

"Well, then, Johnny shall have more time to think of it," returned Mrs. Boffin; "and perhaps you wouldn't mind letting me know how used to it you begin to get, and how it all goes on?"

"I'll send Sloppy," said Mrs. Higden.

So the interview was considered very successful, and Mrs. Boffin was pleased, and all were satisfied.

This piece of business thus put in train, the Secretary drove Mrs. Boffin back to the Bower, and found employment for himself at the new house until evening. Whether, when evening came, he took a way to his lodgings that led through fields, with any design of finding Miss Bella Wilfer in those fields, is not so certain as that she regularly walked there at that hour.

And, moreover, it is certain that there she was.

No longer in mourning, Miss Bella was dressed in as pretty colors as she could muster. There is no denying that she was as pretty as they, and that she and the colors went very prettily together. She was reading as she walked, and of course it is to be inferred, from her showing no knowledge of Mr. Rokesmith's approach, that she did not know he was approaching.

"Eh?" said Miss Bella, raising her eyes from her book, when he stopped before her. "Oh! It's you."

"Only I. A fine evening!"

"Is it?" said Bella, looking coldly around. "I suppose it is, now you mention it. I have not been thinking of the evening."

"So intent upon your book?"

"Ye-e-es," replied Bella, with a drawl of indifference.

"A love story, Miss Wilfer?"

"Oh dear no, or I shouldn't be reading it. It's more about money than anything else."

"And does it say that money is better than anything?"

"Upon my word," returned Bella, "I forget what it says, but you can find out for yourself, if you like, Mr. Rokesmith. I don't want it any more."

The Secretary took the book—she had fluttered the leaves as if it were a fan—and walked beside her.

"I am charged with a message for you, Miss Wilfer, from Mrs. Boffin. She desired me to assure you of the pleasure she has in finding that she will be ready to receive you in another week or two at furthest."

Bella turned her head towards him, with her prettily insolent eyebrows raised, and her eyelids drooping. As much as to say, "How did *you* come by the message, pray?"

"I have been waiting for an opportunity of telling you that I am Mr. Boffin's Secretary."

"Then are you going to be always there, Mr. Roke-smith?" she inquired.

"Always? No. Very much there? Yes."

"Dear me!" drawled Bella.

"But my position there as Secretary, will be very different from yours as guest. You will know little or nothing about me. I shall transact the business; you will transact the pleasure."

As he watched her with a covert look, he saw a certain ambitious triumph in her face, which no assumed coldness could conceal.

And now, in the blooming summer days, behold Mr. and Mrs. Boffin established in the eminently aristocratic family mansion, and behold all manner of crawling, creeping, fluttering, and buzzing creatures, attracted by the gold dust of the Golden Dustman!

Miss Bella Wilfer becomes an inmate, for an indefinite period, of the eminently aristocratic dwelling.

But the old house. There are no designs against the Golden Dustman there? There are no fish of the shark tribe in the Bower waters? Perhaps not. Still, Wegg is established there, and would seem, judged by his secret proceedings, to cherish a notion of making a discovery. For when a man with a wooden leg lies prone on his stomach to peep under bedsteads; and hops up ladders, like some extinct bird, to survey the tops of presses and cupboards; and provides himself an iron rod which he is always poking and prodding into dust-mounds; the probability is that he expects to find something.

CHAPTER XVII.

"SO you want to go and see your sister, Hexam?"

"If you please, Mr. Headstone."

"I have half a mind to go with you. Where does your sister live?"

"Why, she is not settled yet, Mr. Headstone. I'd rather you didn't see her till she is settled, if it was all the same to you."

"Look here, Hexam." Mr. Bradley Headstone, highly certificated stipendiary schoolmaster, drew his right forefinger through one of the buttonholes of the boy's coat, and looked at it attentively. "I hope your sister may be good company for you?"

"Why do you doubt it, Mr. Headstone?"

"I did not say I doubted it."

"No, sir; you didn't say so."

Bradley Headstone looked at his finger again, took it out of the buttonhole and looked at it closer, bit the side of it and looked at it again.

"You see, Hexam, you will be one of us. In good time you are sure to pass a creditable examination and become one of us. Then the question is—"

The boy waited so long for the question, while the schoolmaster looked at a new side of his finger, and bit it, and looked at it again, that at length the boy repeated:

"The question is, sir—?"

"Whether you had not better leave well alone."

"Is it well to leave my sister alone, Mr. Headstone?"

"I do not say so, because I do not know. I put it to you. I ask you to think of it. I want you to consider. You know how well you are doing here."

"After all, she got me here," said the boy, with a struggle.

"Perceiving the necessity of it," acquiesced the schoolmaster, "and making up her mind fully to the separation."

The boy seemed to debate with himself. At length he said, raising his eyes to his master's face:

"I wish you'd come with me and see her, Mr. Headstone, though she is not settled. I wish you'd come with me, and take her in the rough, and judge her for yourself."

"You are sure you would not like to prepare her?"

"My sister Lizzie wants no preparing, Mr. Headstone. What she is, she is, and shows herself to be. There's no pretending about my sister."

His confidence in her sat more easily upon him than the indecision with which he had twice contended. It was his better nature to be true to her, if it were his worse nature to be wholly selfish.

"Well, I can spare the evening," said the schoolmaster. "I am ready to walk with you."

"Thank you, Mr. Headstone. And I am ready to go."

Miss Peecher the schoolmistress was watering the flowers in the little dusty bit of garden attached to her small official residence, with little windows like the eyes in needles, and little doors like the covers of school-books.

Small, shining, neat, methodical, and buxom was Miss Peecher; cherry-cheeked and tuneful of voice. A little pin-cushion, a little housewife, a little book, a little workbox, a little set of tables of weights and measures, and a little woman, all in one. If Mr. Bradley Headstone had addressed a written proposal of marriage to her, she would probably have replied in a complete little essay on the theme exactly a slate long, but would certainly have replied Yes. For she loved him. The decent hair-guard that went round his neck and took care of his decent silver watch was an object of envy to her. So would Miss Peecher have gone round his neck and taken care of him. Of him, insensible. Because he did not love Miss Peecher.

Miss Peecher's favorite pupil, who assisted her in her little household, was in attendance with a can of water to replenish her little watering-pot, and sufficiently divined the state of Miss Peecher's affections to feel it necessary that she herself should love young Charley Hexam. So there was a double palpitation among the double stocks and double wall-flowers, when the master and the boy looked over the gate.

"A fine evening, Miss Peecher," said the Master.

"A very fine evening, Mr. Headstone," said Miss Peecher. "Are you taking a walk?"

"Hexam and I are going to take a long walk."

"Charming weather," remarked Miss Peecher, "*for* a long walk."

"Ours is rather on business than mere pleasure," said the Master. "Good-night, Miss Peecher."

"Good-night, Mr. Headstone."

The pupil had been, in her state of pupilage, so imbued with the class-custom of stretching out an arm, as if to hail a cab or omnibus, whenever she found she had an observation on hand to offer to Miss Peecher, that she often did it in their domestic relations; and she did it now.

"Well, Mary Anne?" said Miss Peecher.

"If you please, ma'am, Hexam said they were going to see his sister."

"But that can't be, I think," returned Miss Peecher: "because Mr. Headstone can have no business with *her*."

Mary Anne again hailed.

"Well, Mary Anne?"

"If you please, ma'am, perhaps it's Hexam's business?"

"That may be," said Miss Peecher. "I didn't think of that. Not that it matters at all."

Mary Anne again hailed.

"Well, Mary Anne?"

"They say she's very handsome."

"Oh, Mary Anne, Mary Anne!" returned Miss Peecher, slightly coloring and shaking her head, a little out of humor; "how often have I told you not to speak in that general way? When you say *they* say, what do you mean? Part of speech *They*?"

"Personal pronoun, third person, plural number."

"Then how many do you mean, Mary Anne? Two? Or more?"

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Mary Anne, "but I don't know that I mean more than her brother himself."

"I felt convinced of it," returned Miss Peecher, smiling again. "Now pray, Mary Anne, be careful another time. He says is very different from they say, remember. Difference between he says and they say? Give it me?"

"One is indicative mood, present tense, third person singular, verb active to say. Other is indicative mood, present tense, third person plural, verb active to say."

"Very good indeed," remarked Miss Peecher, with encouragement. "In fact, could not be better. Don't forget to apply it, another time, Mary Anne."

"This must be where my sister lives, sir," said Charley Hexam. "This is where she came for a temporary lodging, soon after father's death."

The boy knocked, and the door promptly opened with a spring and a click. A parlor door within a small entry stood open, and disclosed a child—a dwarf—a girl—a something—sitting on a little low old-fashioned arm-chair, which had a kind of little working bench before it.

"I can't get up," said the child, "because my back's bad, and my legs are queer. But I'm the person of the house."

"Who else is at home?" asked Charley Hexam, staring.

"Nobody's at home at present," returned the child, with a glib assertion of her dignity, "except the person of the house. What did you want, young man?"

"I wanted to see my sister."

"Many young men have sisters," returned the child. "Give me your name, young man?"

"Hexam is my name."

"Ah, indeed," said the person of the house. "I thought it might be. Your sister will be in, in about a quarter of an hour. I am very fond of your sister. She's my particular friend. Take a seat. And this gentleman's name?"

"Mr. Headstone, my schoolmaster."

"Take a seat. You can't tell me the name of my trade, I'll be bound," she said, after taking several observations.

"I'm a Doll's Dressmaker."

"I hope it's a good business?"

The person of the house shrugged her shoulders and shook her head. "No. Poorly paid. And I'm often so pressed for time! I had a doll married, last week, and was obliged to work all night."

"Are you always as busy as you are now?"

"Busier. I'm slack just now. I finished a large mourning order the day before yesterday. Doll I work for, lost a canary bird." The person of the house gave another little laugh, and then nodded her head several times, as who should moralize, "Oh this world, this world!"

"Are you alone all day?" asked Bradley Headstone. "Don't any of the neighboring children—?"

"Ah, lud!" cried the person of the house, with a little scream, as if the word had pricked her. "Don't talk of children. I can't bear children. I know their tricks and their manners. Give me grown-ups. I always did like grown-ups, and always kept company with them. So sensible. Sit so quiet. Don't go prancing and capering about! And I mean always to keep among none but grown-ups till I marry. I suppose I must make up my mind to marry, one of these days."

She listened to a step outside that caught her ear, and there was a soft knock at the door. Pulling at a handle within her reach, she said, with a pleased laugh: "Now here, for instance, is a grown-up that's my particular friend!" and Lizzie Hexam in a black dress entered the room.

"Charley! You!"

Taking him to her arms in the old way—of which he seemed a little ashamed—she saw no one else.

"There, there, there, Liz, all right, my dear. See! Here's Mr. Headstone come with me."

Her eyes met those of the schoolmaster, who had evidently expected to see a very different sort of person, and a murmured word or two of salutation passed between them. She was a little flurried by the unexpected visit, and the schoolmaster was not at his ease. But he never was, quite.

"I told Mr. Headstone you were not settled, Liz, but he was so kind as to take an interest in coming, and so I brought him. How well you look!"

Bradley seemed to think so.

"I didn't expect a visit from you, Charley," said his sister. "I supposed that if you wanted to see me you would have sent to me, appointing me to come somewhere near the school, as I did last time. Charley always does well, Mr. Headstone?"

"He could not do better. I regard his course as quite plain before him."

"I hoped so. I am so thankful. So well done of you, Charley, dear! It is better for me not to come (except when he wants me) between him and his prospects. You think so, Mr. Headstone?"

Conscious that his pupil-teacher was looking for his answer, and that he himself had suggested the boy's keeping aloof from this sister, now seen for the first time face to face, Bradley Headstone stammered:

"Your brother is very much occupied, you know. He has to work hard. One cannot but say that the less his attention is diverted from his work, the better for his future. When he shall have established himself, why then—it will be another thing then."

Lizzie shook her head again, and returned, with a quiet

smile : " I always advised him as you advise him. Did I not, Charley ? "

" Well, never mind that now," said the boy. " How are you getting on ? "

" Very well, Charley. I want for nothing."

" You have your own room here ? "

" Oh yes. And it's quiet, and pleasant, and airy."

Lizzie, who had not taken off her bonnet, rather hurriedly proposed that as the room was getting dark they should go out into the air.

" I'll saunter on by the river," said Bradley. " You will be glad to talk together."

As his uneasy figure went on before them among the evening shadows, the boy said to his sister, petulantly :

" When are you going to settle yourself in some Christian sort of place, Liz ? I thought you were going to do it before now."

" I am very well where I am, Charley."

" Very well where you are ! I am ashamed to have brought Mr. Headstone with me. How came you to get into such company as that little witch's ? "

" By chance at first, as it seemed, Charley. But I think it must have been by something more than chance, for that child—You remember the bills upon the walls at home ? "

" Confound the bills upon the walls at home ! I want to forget the bills upon the walls at home, and it would be better for you to do the same," grumbled the boy. " Well ; what of them ? "

" This child is the grandchild of the terrible drunken old man, in the list slippers and the nightcap. Her father is like his own father, a weak wretched trembling creature, falling to pieces, never sober. But a good workman too, at the work he does. The mother is dead."

" I don't see what you have to do with her, for all that," said the boy.

" Don't you, Charley ? Any compensation—restitution—never mind the word, you know my meaning. Father's grave."

But he did not respond with any tenderness. After a moody silence he broke out in an ill-used tone :

"It'll be a very hard thing, Liz, if, when I am trying my best to get up in the world, you pull me back."

"I, Charley?"

"Yes, you, Liz. Why can't you let bygones be bygones? Why can't you, as Mr. Headstone said to me this very evening about another matter, leave well alone? What we have got to do, is, to turn our faces full in our new direction, and keep straight on. I don't want, as I raise myself, to shake you off, Liz. I want to carry you up with me. Well then. Don't pull me back, and hold me down. That's all I ask, and surely that's not unconscionable. Come! There's Mr. Headstone stopping, and looking over the wall at the tide, to hint that it's time to go. Kiss me, and tell me that you know I didn't mean to hurt you."

She told him so, and they embraced, and walked on and came up with the schoolmaster.

"But we go your sister's way," he remarked, when the boy told him he was ready. And with his cumbrous and uneasy action he stiffly offered her his arm. Her hand was just within it, when she drew it back. He looked round with a start, as if he thought she had detected something that repelled her, in the momentary touch.

"I will not go in just yet," said Lizzie. "And you have a distance before you, and will walk faster without me."

Being by this time close to Vauxhall Bridge, they resolved, in consequence, to take that way over the Thames, and they left her; Bradley Headstone giving her his hand at parting, and she thanking him for his care of her brother.

The master and the pupil walked on rapidly and silently. They had nearly crossed the bridge, when a gentleman came coolly sauntering towards them, with a cigar in his mouth, his coat thrown back, and his hands behind him.

"Who is that you stare after?" asked Bradley.

"Why!" said the boy, "It is that Wrayburn one!"

Bradley Headstone scrutinized the boy as closely as the boy had scrutinized the gentleman.

"You don't appear to like your friend, Hexam?"

"I don't like him," said the boy.

"Why not?"

"He took hold of me by the chin in a precious impertinent way, the first time I ever saw him," said the boy.

"Again, why?"

"For nothing. Or—it's much the same—because something I happened to say about my sister didn't happen to please him."

"Then he knows your sister?"

"He didn't at that time," said the boy.

"Does now?"

"Yes, sir."

"Going to see her, I dare say."

"It can't be!" said the boy, quickly. "He doesn't know her well enough. I should like to catch him at it! The first time he came to our old place was when my father was alive. He came on business; not that it was *his* business—he never had any business—he was brought by a friend."

"And the other times?"

"There was only one other time that I know of. When my father was killed by accident, he chanced to be one of the finders. He was mooning about, I suppose, taking liberties with people's chins; but there he was, somehow. He brought the news home to my sister early in the morning, and brought Miss Abbey Potterson, a neighbor, to help break it to her. He was mooning about the house when I was fetched home in the afternoon—they didn't know where to find me till my sister could be brought round sufficiently to tell them—and then he mooned away."

"And is that all?"

"That's all, sir."

Bradley Headstone gradually released the boy's arm, as if he were thoughtful, and they walked on side by side as before. After a long silence between them, Bradley resumed the talk.

"I suppose—your sister—" with a curious break both before and after the words, "has received hardly any teaching, Hexam?"

"Hardly any, sir."

"Yet—your sister—scarcely looks or speaks like an ignorant person."

"Lizzie has as much thought as the best, Mr. Headstone. I have never brought myself to mention it openly to you; but it's a painful thing to think that if I get on as well as you hope, I shall be—I won't say disgraced, because I don't mean disgraced—but—rather put to the blush if it was known—by a sister who has been very good to me."

"Yes," said Bradley Headstone in a slurring way, for his mind scarcely seemed to touch that point, so smoothly did it glide to another, "and there is this possibility to consider. Some man who had worked his way might come to admire—your sister—and might even in time bring himself to think of marrying—your sister—and it would be a sad drawback and a heavy penalty upon him, if, overcoming in his mind other inequalities of condition and other considerations against it, this inequality and this consideration remained in full force."

"That's true, sir. Sometimes since Lizzie was left free by father's death, I have thought that such a young woman might soon acquire more than enough to pass muster. And sometimes I have even thought that perhaps Miss Peecher—"

"For the purpose I would advise Nor Miss Peecher," Bradley Headstone struck in, with a recurrence of his late decision of manner.

"Would you be so kind as to think of it for me?"

"Yes, Hexam, yes. I'll think of it. I'll think maturely of it. I'll think well of it."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE person of the house, doll's dressmaker, sat in her quaint little low arm-chair, singing in the dark, until Lizzie came back.

"Well Lizzie-Mizzie-Wizzie," said she, breaking off in her song. "What's the news out-of-doors?"

"What's the news in-doors?" returned Lizzie, playfully smoothing the bright long fair hair which grew very luxuriant and beautiful on the head of the doll's dressmaker.

"Let me see, said the blind man. Why, the last news is, that I don't mean to marry your brother."

"No?"

"No-o," shaking her head and her chin. "Don't like the boy."

"What do you say to his master?"

"I say that I think he's bespoke."

Miss Wren suddenly screwed up her eyes and her chin, and looked prodigiously knowing, "Aha!"

"Who comes here?"

"A Grenadier."

"What does he want?"

"A pot of beer."

And nothing else in the world, my dear."

A man's figure paused on the pavement at the outer door. "Mr. Eugene Wrayburn, ain't it?" said Miss Wren.

"So I am told," was the answer.

"You may come in, if you're good."

"I am not good," said Eugene, "but I'll come in."

He gave his hand to Jenny Wren, and he gave his hand to Lizzie, and he stood leaning by the door at Lizzie's side. He had been strolling with his cigar, he said (it was smoked out and gone by this time), and he had strolled round to return in that direction that he might look in as he passed. Had she not seen her brother to-night?

"Yes," said Lizzie, whose manner was a little troubled.

Gracious condescension on our brother's part! Mr. Eugene Wrayburn thought he had passed my young gentleman on the bridge. Who was his friend with him?

"The schoolmaster."

"To be sure. Looked like it," said Eugene. "I have nothing to report, Lizzie, but having promised you that an eye should be always kept on Mr. Riderhood through my friend Lightwood, I like occasionally to renew my assurance that I keep my promise, and keep my friend up to the mark."

"I should not have doubted it, sir."

"Generally, I confess myself a man to be doubted," returned Eugene, coolly, "for all that."

"Why are you?" asked the sharp Miss Wren.

"Because, my dear, I am a bad idle dog."

"Then why don't you reform, and be a good dog?" inquired Miss Wren.

"Because, my dear, there's nobody who makes it worth my while. Have you considered my suggestion, Lizzie?" This in a lower voice, but only as if it were a graver matter; not at all to the exclusion of the person of the house.

"I have thought of it, Mr. Wrayburn, but I have not been able to make up my mind to accept it."

"False pride!" said Eugene.

"I think not, Mr. Wrayburn. I hope not."

"False pride!" repeated Eugene. "Why, what else is it? The thing is worth nothing in itself. The thing is worth nothing to me. What can it be worth to me? You know the most I make of it. I propose to be of some use to somebody—which I never was in this world, and never shall be on any other occasion—by paying some qualified person of your own sex and age, so many (or rather so few) contemptible shillings, to come here, certain nights in the week, and give you certain instruction which you wouldn't want if you hadn't been a self-denying daughter and sister. You know that it's good to have it, or you would never have so devoted yourself to your brother's having it. Then why not have it: especially when our friend Miss Jenny here would profit by it too? If I proposed to be the teacher, or to attend the lessons—obviously incongruous!—but as to that, I might as well be on the other side of the globe, or not on the globe at all. Your false pride does wrong to yourself and does wrong to your dead father."

"How to my father, Mr. Wrayburn?" she asked.

"How to your father? Can you ask! By determining that the deprivation to which he condemned you, and which he forced upon you, shall always rest upon his head."

It chanced to be a subtle string to sound, in her who had so spoken to her brother within the hour. It sounded far more forcibly, because of the change in the speaker for the moment; the passing appearance of earnestness, complete conviction, injured resentment of suspicion, generous and unselfish interest. All these qualities, in him usually so light and careless, she felt to be inseparable from some touch of their opposites in her own breast. She thought, had she, so far below him and so different, rejected this disinterestedness because of some vain misgiving that he sought her

out, or heeded any personal attractions that he might descry in her? The poor girl, pure of heart and purpose, could not bear to think it. Sinking before her own eyes, as she suspected herself of it, she drooped her head as though she had done him some wicked and grievous injury, and broke into silent tears.

"Don't be distressed," said Eugene, very, very kindly. "I hope it is not I who have distressed you. I meant no more than to put the matter in its true light before you; though I acknowledge I did it selfishly enough, for I am disappointed."

Disappointed of doing her a service. How else *could* he be disappointed?

"It won't break my heart," laughed Eugene; "It won't stay by me eight-and-forty hours; but I am genuinely disappointed. I had set my fancy on doing this little thing for you and for our friend Miss Jenny. The novelty of my doing anything in the least useful, had its charms. I see, now, that I might have managed it better. I might have affected to do it wholly for our friend Miss J. I might have got myself up, morally, as Sir Eugene Bountiful. But upon my soul I can't make flourishes, and I would rather be disappointed than try."

If he meant to follow home what was in Lizzie's thoughts, it was skillfully done. If he followed it by mere fortuitous coincidence, it was done by an evil chance.

"If you had quite understood my whole meaning at first, I think you would not have refused. Do you think you would?"

"I—I don't know that I should, Mr. Wrayburn."

"Well! Then why refuse, now you do understand it? Lizzie Hexam, as I truly respect you, and as I am your friend and a poor devil of a gentleman, I protest I don't even now understand why you hesitate."

There was an appearance of openness, trustfulness, unsuspecting generosity, in his words and manner, that won the poor girl over; and not only won her over, but again caused her to feel as though she had been influenced by the opposite qualities, with vanity at their head.

"I will not hesitate any longer, Mr. Wrayburn. I hope

you will not think the worse of me for having hesitated at all. For myself and for Jenny I thankfully accept your kind offer."

"Agreed! Dismissed!" said Eugene, giving Lizzie his hand before lightly waving it, as if he waved the whole subject away. "I hope it may not be often that so much is made of so little!"

Then he fell to talking playfully with Jenny Wren, who said at last, "Well, it's Saturday night, and my child's coming home. And my child is a troublesome bad child, and costs me a world of scolding. I would rather you didn't see my child."

"A doll?" said Eugene.

But Lizzie, with her lips only, shaping the two words, "Her father," he took his leave immediately. At the corner of the street he stopped to light another cigar, and possibly to ask himself what he was doing otherwise. If so, the answer was indefinite and vague. Who knows what he is doing, who is careless what he does?

A man stumbled against him as he turned away, who mumbled some maudlin apology. Looking after this man, Eugene saw him go in at the door by which he himself had just come out.

On the man's stumbling into the room, Lizzie rose to leave.

"Don't go away, Miss Hexam," he said in a submissive manner, speaking thickly and with difficulty. "Don't fly from unfortunate man in shattered state of health. Give poor invalid honor of your company. It ain't—ain't catching."

Lizzie murmured that she had something to do in her own room, and went away up-stairs.

"How's my Jenny?" said the man timidly. "How's my Jenny Wren, best of children, object dearest affections broken-hearted invalid?"

To which the person of the house, stretching out her arm in an attitude of command, replied with irresponsive asperity: "Go along with you! Go along into your corner! Get into your corner directly!"

The wretched spectacle made as if he would have offered some remonstrance; but not venturing to resist the person

of the house, thought better of it, and went and sat down on a particular chair of disgrace.

"Oh-h-h!" cried the person of the house, pointing her little finger, "You bad old boy! O-h-h you naughty wicked creature! *I* know your tricks and your manners, *I* know where you've been to!" (which indeed it did not require discernment to discover). "Oh, you disgraceful old chap!"

"Poor shattered invalid. Trouble nobody long," cried the wretched figure.

"Come, come!" said the person of the house, "you know what you've got to do. Put down your money this instant."

Such a business as he made of collecting it from his dogs'-eared pockets; of expecting it in this pocket, and not finding it; of not expecting it in that pocket, and passing it over; of finding no pocket where that other pocket ought to be!

"Is this all?" demanded the person of the house, when a confused heap of pence and shillings lay on the table. "Turn all your pockets inside out, and leave 'em so!"

He obeyed. And if anything could have made him look more abject or more dismally ridiculous than before, it would have been his so displaying himself.

"Here's but seven and eightpence halfpenny! Oh you prodigal old son! Get along with you to bed!"

CHAPTER XIX.

FASCINATION FLEDGEBY was the meanest cur existing, with a single pair of legs.

Whether this young gentleman (for he was but three-and-twenty) combined with the miserly vice of an old man, any of the open-handed vices of a young one, was a moot point; so very honorably did he keep his own counsel. He was sensible of the value of appearances as an investment, and liked to dress well; but he drove a bargain for every movable about him, from the coat on his back to the china on his breakfast-table; and every bargain, by representing somebody's ruin or somebody's loss, acquired a peculiar charm for him. It was a part of his avarice to take, within

narrow bounds, long odds at races; if he won, he drove harder bargains; if he lost, he half starved himself until next time.

He feigned to be a young gentleman living on his means, but was known secretly to be a kind of outlaw in the bill-broking line.

It was a public holiday, and Fledgeby, walking into the City in the holiday afternoon, walked against a living stream setting out of it; and thus, when he turned into the precincts of St. Mary Axe, he found a prevalent repose and quiet there. A yellow overhanging plaster-fronted house at which he stopped was quiet too. The blinds were all drawn down, and the inscription Pubsey and Co. seemed to doze in the counting-house window on the ground-floor giving on the sleepy street.

Fledgeby knocked and rang, and Fledgeby rang and knocked, but no one came. Fledgeby crossed the narrow street and looked up at the house-windows, but nobody looked down at Fledgeby. He got out of temper, crossed the narrow street again, and pulled the house-bell as if it were the house's nose, and he pulled and continued to pull, until a human nose appeared in the dark door-way.

"Now you, sir! These are nice games!"

He addressed an old Jewish man in an ancient coat, long of skirt, and wide of pocket. A venerable man, bald and shining at the top of his head, and with long gray hair flowing down at its sides and mingling with his beard. A man who with a graceful Eastern action of homage bent his head, and stretched out his hands with the palms downward, as if to deprecate the wrath of a superior.

"What have you been up to?" said Fledgeby.

"Generous Christian master," urged the Jewish man, "it being holiday, I looked for no one."

"Holiday be blowed!" said Fledgeby, entering. "What have *you* got to do with holidays? Shut the door."

Fledgeby turned into the counting-house, perched himself on a business stool, and cocked his hat. There were light boxes on shelves in the counting-house, and strings of mock beads hanging up. There were samples of cheap clocks and cheap vases of flowers. Foreign toys, all.

"You have not told me what you were up to, you sir," said Fledgeby, scratching his head with the brim of his hat.

"Sir, I was breathing the air."

"In the cellar, that you didn't hear?"

"On the house-top."

"Upon my soul! That's a way of doing business."

"Sir," the old man represented with a grave and patient air, "there must be two parties to the transaction of business, and the holiday has left me alone."

"Ah! Can't be buyer and seller too. That's what the Jews say; ain't it?"

"At least we say truly, if we say so," answered the old man with a smile.

"Your people need speak the truth sometimes, for they lie enough," remarked Fascination Fledgeby. "For instance you would persuade me if you could, that you are a poor Jew. I wish you'd confess how much you really did make out of my late governor."

"I had had sickness and misfortunes, and was so poor," said the old man, "as hopelessly to owe the father, principal and interest. The son inheriting, was so merciful as to forgive me both, and place me here."

"Riah, who believes you to be poor now?"

"No one," said the old man. "No one. All scout it as a fable. Were I to say 'This little fancy business is not mine; it is the little business of a Christian young gentleman who places me, his servant, in trust and charge here, and to whom I am accountable for every single bead,' they would laugh. When, in the larger money-business, I tell the borrowers—"

"I say old chap!" interposed Fledgeby, "I hope you mind what you *do* tell 'em?"

"Sir, I tell them no more than I am about to repeat. When I tell them 'I cannot promise this, I cannot answer for the other, I must see my principal, I have not the money, I am a poor man and it does not rest with me,' they are so unbelieving and so impatient, that they sometimes curse me in Jehovah's name."

"That's deuced good, that is!" said Fledgeby.

"And at other times they say, 'Can it never be done without these tricks, Mr. Riah? Come, come, Mr. Riah, we

know the arts of your people'—my people!—'If the money is to be lent, fetch it, fetch it; if it is not to be lent, keep it and say so.' They never believe me."

"*That's all right,*" said Fascination Fledgeby. "Look here, Riah, I want to go a little more into buying up queer bills. Look out in that direction. And there's one thing more. Come to me with the books for periodical inspection as usual, at eight on Monday morning."

Riah drew some tablets from his breast and noted it down.

"That's all I wanted to say at the present time," continued Fledgeby in a grudging vein, as he got off the stool, "except that I wish you'd take the air where you can hear the bell, or the knocker, either one of the two or both. By-the-bye, how *do* you take the air at the top of the house? Do you stick your head out of a chimney-pot?"

"Sir, there are leads there, and I have made a little garden there."

"To bury your money in, you old dodger?"

"A thumb-nail's space of garden would hold the treasure I bury, master," said Riah. "Twelve shillings a week, even when they are an old man's wages, bury themselves."

"I should like to know what you really are worth," returned Fledgeby, with whom his growing rich on that stipend and gratitude was a very convenient fiction. "But come! Let's have a look at your garden on the tiles!"

The old man took a step back, and hesitated.

"Truly, sir, I have company there."

"Have you, by George!" said Fledgeby: "I suppose you happen to know whose premises these are?"

"Sir, they are yours, and I am your servant in them."

"Oh! I thought you might have overlooked that," retorted Fledgeby, with his eyes on Riah's beard as he felt for his own; "having company on my premises, you know!"

"Come up and see the guests, sir. I hope for your admission that they can do no harm."

Some final wooden steps conducted them, stooping under a low penthouse roof, to the house-top. Riah stood still, and, turning to his master, pointed out his guests.

Lizzie Hexam and Jenny Wren. For whom, perhaps with some old instinct of his race, the gentle Jew had spread

a carpet. Seated on it, against no more romantic object than a blackened chimney-stack over which some humble creeper had been trained, they both pored over one book.

When they returned to the entry, Fledgeby said to the old man :

"That's a handsome girl, that one in her senses."

"And as good as handsome," answered Riah.

"At all events," observed Fledgeby, with a dry whistle, "I hope she ain't bad enough to put any chap up to the fastenings, and get the premises broken open. You look out. Keep your weather eye awake, and don't make any more acquaintances, however handsome. Of course you always keep my name to yourself?"

"Sir, assuredly I do."

"If they ask it, say it's Pubsey, or say it's Co, or say it's anything you like, but what it is."


CHAPTER XX.

A GAIN Mr. Mortimer Lightwood and Mr. Eugene Wrayburn sat together in the Temple. This evening, however, they were not together in the place of business of the eminent solicitor, but in another dismal set of chambers facing it on the same second floor; on whose dungeon-like outer-door appeared the legend:

PRIVATE.

MR. EUGENE WRAYBURN.

MR. MORTIMER LIGHTWOOD.

( *Mr. Lightwood's Offices opposite.*)

Appearances indicated that this establishment was a very recent institution. The white letters of the inscription were extremely white and extremely strong to the sense of smell, the complexion of the tables and chairs was (like Lady Toppins's) a little too blooming to be believed in, and the carpets and floor-cloth seemed to rush at the beholder's face in the unusual prominence of their patterns.

"Well!" said Eugene, on one side of the fire, "I feel tolerably comfortable. I hope the upholsterer may do the same."

"Why shouldn't he?" asked Lightwood, from the other side of the fire.

"To be sure," pursued Eugene, reflecting, "he is not in the secret of our pecuniary affairs, so perhaps he may be in an easy frame of mind."

"We shall pay him," said Mortimer.

"Shall we, really?" returned Eugene, indolently surprised. "You don't say so!"

"I mean to pay him, Eugene, for my part," said Mortimer, in a slightly injured tone.

"Ah! I mean to pay him too," retorted Eugene. "But then I mean so much that I—that I don't mean."

"Don't mean?"

"So much that I only mean and shall always only mean and nothing more, my dear Mortimer. It's the same thing."

Mortimer laughed with his usual commentaries of "*How can you be so ridiculous, Eugene!*" and "*What an absurd fellow you are!*" but when his laugh was out, there was something serious, if not anxious, in his face.

"Eugene," said he, "if I could find you in earnest for a minute, I would try to say an earnest word to you."

"An earnest word?" repeated Eugene. "Say on."

"Well, I will," returned the other. "All this past summer you have been withholding something from me. I don't ask what it is, as you have not told me; but the fact is so. Say, is it not?"

"I give you my word of honor, Mortimer," returned Eugene, after a serious pause of a few moments, "that I don't know."

"Don't know, Eugene?"

"Upon my soul, don't know. I know less about myself than about most people in the world, and I don't know."

"You have some design in your mind?"

"Have I? I don't think I have."

"At any rate, you have some subject of interest there which used not to be there?"

"I really can't say," replied Eugene, shaking his head blankly, after pausing again to reconsider. "At times I have thought yes; at other times I have thought no. Now, I have been inclined to pursue such a subject; now I have

felt that it was absurd, and that it tired and embarrassed me. Absolutely, I can't say. Frankly and faithfully, I would if I could."

So replying, he clapped a hand on his friend's shoulder, as he rose from his seat upon the bed, and said:

"Come, dear boy! Let us try the effect of smoking. If it enlightens me at all on this question, I will impart unreservedly."

They returned to the room they had come from, and finding it heated, opened a window. Having lighted their cigars, they leaned out of this window, smoking, and looking down at the moonlight, as it shone into the court below.

"No enlightenment," resumed Eugene, after certain minutes of silence. "I feel sincerely apologetic, my dear Mortimer, but nothing comes."

"If nothing comes," returned Mortimer, "nothing can come from it. So I shall hope that this may hold good throughout, and that there may be nothing on foot. Nothing injurious to you, Eugene, or—"

Eugene stayed him for a moment with his hand on his arm, while he took a piece of earth from an old flower-pot on the window-sill and dexterously shot it at a little point of light opposite; having done which to his satisfaction, he said, "Or?"

"Or injurious to any one else."

"How," said Eugene, taking another little piece of earth, and shooting it with great precision at the former mark, "how injurious to any one else?"

"I don't know."

"And," said Eugene, taking, as he said the word, another shot, "to whom else?"

"I don't know."

Checking himself with another piece of earth in his hand, Eugene looked at his friend inquiringly and a little suspiciously.

"Two belated wanderers in the mazes of the law," said he, "stray into the court. They examine the door-posts of number one, seeking the name they want. Not finding it at number one, they come to number two. On the hat of wanderer number two, the shorter one, I drop this pellet. Hit-

ting him on the hat, I smoke serenely, and become absorbed in contemplation of the sky. When they emerge, you shall see me bring them both down ;” and he prepared two pellets for the purpose.

He had not reckoned on their seeking his name, or Lightwood’s. But now there came a knock at the door. “I am on duty to-night,” said Mortimer, “stay you where you are, Eugene.” Requiring no persuasion, he stayed there, smoking quietly, not at all curious to know who knocked, until Mortimer spoke to him from within the room, and touched him. Then, drawing in his head, he found the visitors to be young Charley Hexam and the schoolmaster ; both standing facing him, and both recognized at a glance.

“You recollect this young fellow, Eugene ?”

“Let me look at him,” returned Wrayburn, coolly. “Oh, yes, yes. I recollect him !”

“He says he has something to say.”

“Surely it must be to you, Mortimer.”

“So I thought, but he says no. He says it is to you.”

“Yes, I do say so,” interposed the boy. “And I mean to say what I want to say, too, Mr. Eugene Wrayburn !”

Passing him with his eyes as if there were nothing where he stood, Eugene looked on to Bradley Headstone. With consummate indolence he turned to Mortimer, inquiring : “And who may this other person be ?”

“I am Charles Hexam’s friend,” said Bradley ; “I am Charles Hexam’s schoolmaster.”

“My good sir, you should teach your pupils better manners,” returned Eugene.

Composedly smoking, he leaned an elbow on the chimney-piece, at the side of the fire, and looked at the schoolmaster. It was a cruel look, in its cold disdain of him, as a creature of no worth. The schoolmaster looked at him, and that, too, was a cruel look, though of the different kind, that it had a raging jealousy and fiery wrath in it.

Very remarkably, neither Eugene Wrayburn nor Bradley Headstone looked at all at the boy. Through the ensuing dialogue, those two, no matter who spoke, or who was addressed, looked at each other. There was some secret, sure perception between them, which set them against one another in all ways.

"In some high respects, Mr. Eugene Wrayburn," said Bradley, answering him with pale and quivering lips, "the natural feelings of my pupils are stronger than my teaching."

"In most respects, I dare say," replied Eugene, enjoying his cigar, "though whether high or low is of no importance. You have my name very correctly. Pray what is yours?"

"It cannot concern you much to know, but—"

"True," interposed Eugene, striking sharply and cutting him short at his mistake, "it does not concern me at all to know. I can say Schoolmaster, which is a most respectable title. You are right, Schoolmaster."

It was not the dullest part of this goad in its galling of Bradley Headstone, that he had made it himself in a moment of incautious anger. He tried to set his lips so as to prevent their quivering, but they quivered fast.

"Mr. Eugene Wrayburn," said the boy, "I want a word with you. I have wanted it so much, that we have looked out your address in the book, and we have been to your office, and we have come from your office here."

"You have given yourself much trouble, Schoolmaster," observed Eugene, blowing the feathery ash from his cigar. "I hope it may prove remunerative."

"And I am glad to speak," pursued the boy, "in presence of Mr. Lightwood, because it was through Mr. Lightwood that you ever saw my sister."

For a mere moment, Wrayburn turned his eyes aside from the schoolmaster to note the effect of the last word on Mortimer, who, standing on the opposite side of the fire, as soon as the word was spoken, turned his face towards the fire and looked down into it.

"Similarly, it was through Mr. Lightwood that you ever saw her again, for you were with him on the night when my father was found, and so I found you with her on the next day. Since then, you have seen my sister often. You have seen my sister oftener and oftener. And I want to know why?"

"Was this worth while, Schoolmaster?" murmured Eugene. "So much trouble for nothing? You should know best, but I think not."

"I don't know, Mr. Wrayburn," answered Bradley, with his passion rising, "why you address me—"

"Don't you?" said Eugene. "Then I won't."

Not another word did Eugene deem it worth while to utter, but stood leaning his head upon his hand, smoking, and looking imperturbably at the chafing Bradley Headstone with his clutching right-hand, until Bradley was well-nigh mad.

"Mr. Wrayburn," proceeded the boy, "we not only know this that I have charged upon you, but we know more. It has not yet come to my sister's knowledge that we have found it out, but we have. We had a plan, Mr. Headstone and I, for my sister's education, and for its being advised and overlooked by Mr. Headstone, who is a much more competent authority, whatever you may pretend to think, as you smoke, than you could produce, if you tried. What do we find, Mr. Lightwood? Why, we find that my sister is already being taught, without our knowing it. We find that while my sister gives an unwilling and cold ear to our schemes for her advantage, she is willfully and willingly profiting by other schemes. Ay, and taking pains, too, for I know what such pains are. And so does Mr. Headstone! Well! Somebody pays for this, is a thought that naturally occurs to us; who pays? We apply ourselves to find out, Mr. Lightwood, and we find that your friend, this Mr. Eugene Wrayburn, here, pays. Then I ask him what right has he to do it, and what does he mean by it, and how comes he to be taking such a liberty without my consent, when I am raising myself in the scale of society by my own exertions and Mr. Headstone's aid, and have no right to have any darkness cast upon my prospects, or any imputation upon my respectability, through my sister?"

The boyish weakness of this speech, combined with its great selfishness, made it a poor one indeed. And yet Bradley Headstone, used to the little audience of a school, and unused to the larger ways of men, showed a kind of exultation in it.

"Now I tell Mr. Eugene Wrayburn," pursued the boy, forced into the use of the third person by the hopelessness of addressing him in the first, "that I object to his having any

acquaintance at all with my sister, and that I request him to drop it altogether. He is not to take it into his head that I am afraid of my sister's caring for *him*—"

(As the boy sneered, the master sneered, and Eugene blew off the feathery ash again.)

—"But I object to it, and that's enough. I am more important to my sister than he thinks. As I raise myself, I intend to raise her; she knows that, and she has to look to me for her prospects. Now I understand all this very well, and so does Mr. Headstone. My sister is an excellent girl, but she has some romantic notions; not about such things as your Mr. Eugene Wrayburns, but about the death of my father and other matters of that sort. Mr. Wrayburn encourages those notions to make himself of importance, and so she thinks she ought to be grateful to him, and perhaps even likes to be. Now I don't choose her to be grateful to him or to be grateful to anybody but me, except Mr. Headstone. And I tell Mr. Wrayburn that if he don't take heed of what I say, it will be worse for her. Let him turn that over in his memory. Worse for her!"

A pause ensued, in which the schoolmaster looked very awkward.

"May I suggest, Schoolmaster," said Eugene, removing his fast-waning cigar from his lips to glance at it, "that you can now take your pupil away."

"And Mr. Lightwood," added the boy, with a burning face, under the flaming aggravation of getting no sort of answer or attention, "I hope you'll take notice of what I have said to your friend, and of what your friend has heard me say, word by word, whatever he pretends to the contrary. You are bound to take notice of it Mr. Lightwood, for, as I have already mentioned, you first brought your friend into my sister's company, and but for you we never should have seen him. Lord knows none of us ever wanted him, any more than any of us will ever miss him. Now Mr. Headstone, as Mr. Eugene Wrayburn has been obliged to hear what I had to say, and couldn't help himself, and as I have said it out to the last word, we have done all we wanted to, and may go."

"Go down-stairs, and leave me a moment, Hexam," he

returned. The boy complying with an indignant look and as much noise as he could make, swung out of the room; and Lightwood went to the window, and leaned there, looking out.

"You think me of no more value than the dirt under your feet," said Bradley, speaking in a carefully weighed and measured tone, or he could not have spoken at all.

"I assure you, Schoolmaster," replied Eugene, "I don't think about you."

"That's not true," returned the other; "you know better."

"That's coarse," Eugene retorted; "but you *don't* know better."

"Mr. Wrayburn, at least I know very well that it would be idle to set myself against you in insolent words or overbearing manners. That lad who has just gone out could put you to shame in half-a-dozen branches of knowledge in half an hour, but you can throw him aside like an inferior. You can do as much by me, I have no doubt, beforehand."

"Possibly," remarked Eugene.

"But I am more than a lad," said Bradley, with his clutching hand, "and I *WILL* be heard, sir."

"As a schoolmaster," said Eugene, "you are always being heard. That ought to content you."

"But it does not content me," replied the other, white with passion. "Do you suppose that a man, in forming himself for the duties I discharge, and in watching and repressing himself daily to discharge them well, dismisses a man's nature?"

"I suppose you," said Eugene, "judging from what I see as I look at you, to be rather too passionate for a good schoolmaster." As he spoke, he tossed away the end of his cigar.

"Passionate with you, sir, I admit I am. Passionate with you, sir, I respect myself for being. But I have not devils for my pupils."

"For your teachers, I should rather say," replied Eugene.

"Mr. Wrayburn."

"Schoolmaster."

"Sir, my name is Bradley Headstone."

"As you justly said, my good sir, your name cannot concern me. Now, what more?"

"This more. Oh, what a misfortune is mine," cried Bradley, breaking off to wipe the starting perspiration from his face as he shook from head to foot, "that I cannot so control myself as to appear a stronger creature than this, when a man who has not felt in all his life what I have felt in a day can so command himself!" He said it in a very agony, and even followed it with an errant motion of his hands as if he could have torn himself.

Eugene Wrayburn looked on at him, as if he found him beginning to be rather an entertaining study.

"Mr. Wrayburn, I desire to say something to you on my own part."

"Come, come, Schoolmaster," returned Eugene, with a languid approach to impatience as the other again struggled with himself; "say what you have to say. And let me remind you that the door is standing open, and your young friend waiting for you on the stairs."

"When I accompanied that youth here, sir, I did so with the purpose of adding, as a man whom you should not be permitted to put aside, in case you put him aside as a boy, that his instinct is correct and right." Thus Bradley Headstone, with great effort and difficulty.

"Is that all?" asked Eugene.

"No, sir," said the other, flushed and fierce. "I strongly support him in his disapproval of your visits to his sister, and in his objection to your officiousness—and worse—in what you have taken upon yourself to do for her."

"Is *that* all?" asked Eugene.

"No, sir. I determined to tell you that you are not justified in these proceedings, and that they are injurious to his sister."

"Are you her schoolmaster as well as her brother's?—Or perhaps you would like to be?" said Eugene.

It was a stab that the blood followed, in its rush to Bradley Headstone's face, as swiftly as if it had been dealt with a dagger. "What do you mean by that?" was as much as he could utter.

"A natural ambition enough," said Eugene, coolly. "Far be it from me to say otherwise. The sister—who is something too much upon your lips, perhaps—is so very different

from all the associations to which she has been used, and from all the low obscure people about her, that it is a very natural ambition."

"Do you throw my obscurity in my teeth, Mr. Wrayburn?"

"How I can reproach you with what is not within my knowledge, or how I can cast stones that were never in my hand, is a problem for the ingenuity of a schoolmaster to prove," returned Eugene. "Is *that* all?"

"No, sir. If you suppose that boy—"

"Who really will be tired of waiting," said Eugene.

"If you suppose that boy to be friendless, you deceive yourself. I am his friend, and you shall find me so."

"And you will find *him* on the stairs," remarked Eugene.

"You may have promised yourself, sir, that you could do what you chose here, because you had to deal with a mere boy, inexperienced, friendless, and unassisted. But I give you warning that this mean calculation is wrong. You have to do with a man also. You have to do with me. I will support him, and, if need be, require reparation for him. My hand and heart are in this cause, and are open to him."

"And—quite a coincidence—the door is open," remarked Eugene.

"I scorn your shifty evasions, and I scorn you," said the schoolmaster. "In the meanness of your nature you revile me with the meanness of my birth. I hold you in contempt for it."

With a consciously bad grace and stiff manner, as Wrayburn looked so easily and calmly on, he went out with these words, and the heavy door closed like a furnace-door upon his red and white heats of rage.

"A curious monomaniac," said Eugene. "The man seems to believe that everybody was acquainted with his mother!"

Mortimer Lightwood being still at the window, to which he had in delicacy withdrawn, Eugene called to him, and he fell to slowly pacing the room.

"My dear fellow," said Eugene, as he lighted another cigar, "I fear my unexpected visitors have been troublesome. If as a set-off (excuse the legal phrase from a barrister-at-law) you would like to ask Tippins to tea, I pledge myself to make love to her."

"Eugene, Eugene, Eugene," replied Mortimer, "I am sorry for this. And to think that I have been so blind!"

"How blind, dear boy?" inquired his unmoved friend.

"What were your words that night at the river-side public-house?" said Lightwood, stopping. "What was it that you asked me? Did I feel like a dark combination of traitor and pickpocket when I thought of that girl?"

"I seem to remember the expression," said Eugene.

"How do *you* feel when you think of her just now?"

His friend made no direct reply, but observed, after a few whiffs of his cigar, "Don't mistake the situation. There is no better girl in all this London than Lizzie Hexam. There is no better among my people at home; no better among your people."

"Granted. What follows?"

"There," said Eugene, looking after him dubiously as he paced away to the other end of the room, "you put me again upon guessing the riddle that I have given up."

"Eugene, do you design to capture and desert this girl?"

"My dear fellow, no."

"Do you design to marry her?"

"My dear fellow, no."

"Do you design to pursue her?"

"My dear fellow, I don't design anything. I have no design whatever. I am incapable of designs. If I conceived a design, I should speedily abandon it, exhausted by the operation."

"Are you in communication with this girl, and is what these people say true?"

"I concede both admissions to my honorable and learned friend."

"Then what is to come of it? What are you doing? Where are you going?"

"My dear Mortimer, one would think the schoolmaster had left behind him a catechising infection. You are ruffled by the want of another cigar. Take one of these, I entreat. Light it at mine, which is in perfect order. So! Now do me the justice to believe I would answer your questions instantly if I could. But to enable me to do so, I must first have found out the troublesome conundrum long abandoned."

Here it is. Eugene Wrayburn." Tapping his forehead and breast. "Riddle-me, riddle-me-ree, perhaps you can tell me what this may be?—No, upon my life I can't. I give it up!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE arrangement between Mr. Boffin and his literary man, Mr. Silas Wegg, so far altered with the altered habits of Mr. Boffin's life, as that the Roman Empire usually declined in the morning, and in the eminently aristocratic family mansion, rather than in the evening, as of yore, and in Boffin's Bower. There were occasions, however, when Mr. Boffin, seeking a brief refuge from the blandishments of fashion, would present himself at the Bower after dark, to anticipate the next sallying forth of Wegg, and would there, on the old settle, pursue the downward fortunes of those enervated and corrupted masters of the world, who were by this time on their last legs.

Two or three diplomatic interviews, the result of great subtlety on Mr. Wegg's part, had enabled him to complete his bargain with Mr. Venus.

"Bring me round to the Bower," said Silas, when the bargain was closed, "next Saturday evening, and if a sociable glass of old Jamaikey warm should meet your views, I am not the man to begrudge it."

Saturday evening is come, and Mr. Venus.

"Here is your purchase, Mr. Wegg," says Venus, politely handing it over, "and I am glad to restore it to the source from which it—flowed."

"Thankee," says Wegg.

In Mr. Wegg's sitting-room, made bright on the chilly evening by gaslight and fire, Mr. Venus softens, and compliments him on his abode; profiting by the occasion to remind Wegg that he (Venus) told him he had got into a good thing.

"Tolerable," Wegg rejoins. "But bear in mind, Mr. Venus, that there's no gold without its alloy. Mix for yourself and take a seat in the chimbley-corner."

"And there's alloy even in this metal of yours, Mr. Wegg?"

"Mystery," returns Wegg. "I don't like it, Mr. Venus. I don't like to have the life knocked out of former inhabitants of this house, in the gloomy dark, and not know who did it."

"Might you have any suspicions, Mr. Wegg?"

"No," returns that gentleman. "I know who profits by it. But I've no suspicions. Here is an immense fortune drops from the clouds upon a person that shall be nameless. Here is a weekly allowance, with a certain weight of coals, drops from the clouds upon me. Which of us is the better man? Not the person who shall be nameless. That's an observation of mine, but I don't make it an objection. I take my allowance and my certain weight of coals. He takes his fortune. That's the way it works. Again look here," pursues Silas, "here's another observation, Mr. Venus, unaccompanied with an objection. Him that shall be nameless is liable to be talked over. He gets talked over. Him that shall be nameless, having me at his right hand, naturally looking to be promoted higher, and you may perhaps say meriting to be promoted higher—"

(Mr. Venus murmurs that he does say so.)

"Him that shall be nameless, under such circumstances, passes me by, and puts a talking-over stranger above my head. Which of us two is the better man? Which of us two can repeat most poetry? Which of us two has, in the service of him that shall be nameless, tackled the Romans, both civil and military, till he has got as husky as if he'd been weaned and ever since brought up on sawdust? Not the talking-over stranger. Yet the house is as free to him as if it was his, and he has his room, and is put upon a footing, and draws about a thousand a year. I am banished to the Bower, to be found in it like a piece of furniture whenever wanted. Merit, therefore, don't win. That's the way it works. I observe it, because I can't help observing it, being accustomed to take a powerful sight of notice; but I don't object. Ever here before, Mr. Venus?"

"Not inside the gate, Mr. Wegg."

"We were talking of old Mr. Harmon being a friend of yours."

"Not a friend, Mr. Wegg. Only known to speak to, and

to have a little deal with now and then. A very inquisitive character, regarding what was found in the dust."

"Did you ever hear him mention," returns Wegg, "how he found it, my dear friend? Living on the mysterious premises, one would like to know. For instance, where he found things? Or, for instance, how he set about it? Whether he began at the top of the mounds, or whether he began at the bottom. Whether he prodded; or whether he scooped? Should you say scooped, my dear Mr. Venus; or should you—as a man—say prodded?"

"I should say neither, Mr. Wegg. Because I suppose, sir, that what was found, was found in the sorting and sifting."

"Living (as I said before) on the mysterious premises," says Wegg, "one likes to know. Would you be inclined to say now—as a brother—that he ever hid things in the dust, as well as found 'em?"

"Mr. Wegg, on the whole, I should say he might."

Mr. Wegg claps on his spectacles, and admiringly surveys Mr. Venus from head to foot.

"As a mortal equally with myself, I take your hand in mine for the first time this day, and, sir, I now propose a friendly move. If there *is* anything to be found on these premises, let us find it together. Let us make the friendly move of agreeing to look for it together. Let us make the friendly move of agreeing to share the profits of it equally betwixt us. In the cause of the right." Thus Silas, assuming a noble air.

The articles of the friendly move are then severally recited and agreed upon. They are but secrecy, fidelity, and perseverance: The Bower to be always free of access to Mr. Venus for his researches, and every precaution to be taken against their attracting observation in the neighborhood.

"There's a footstep!" exclaims Venus.

"Where?" cries Wegg, starting.

"Outside. St!"

It approaches the window, and a hand taps at the glass. "Come in!" calls Wegg; meaning come round by the door. But the heavy old-fashioned sash is slowly raised, and a head slowly looks in out of the dark background of the night.

"Pray is Mr. Silas Wegg here? Oh! I see him! Good

evening, Mr. Wegg. The yard gate-lock should be looked to, if you please; it doesn't catch."

"Is it Mr. Rokesmith?" falters Wegg.

"It is Mr. Rokesmith. Don't let me disturb you. I am not coming in. I have only a message for you, which I undertook to deliver on my way home to my lodgings. Mr. Boffin wishes you to know that he does not expect you to stay at home any evening, on the chance of his coming. It has occurred to him that he may, without intending it, have been a tie upon you. In future, if he should come without notice, he will take his chance of finding you, and it will be all the same to him if he does not."

With that, and "Good-night," the Secretary lowers the window, and disappears.

"And for that individual, Mr. Venus," remarks Wegg, when he is fully gone, "*I have been passed over!* Let me ask you what you think of him?"

Mr. Venus thinks he has "a singular look."

"A double look, you mean, sir," rejoins Wegg, playing bitterly upon the word. "That's *his* look. Any amount of singular look for me, but not a double look! That's an underhanded mind, sir. Remembrances of Our House, of Master George, of Aunt Jane, of Uncle Parker, all laid waste! All offered up sacrifices to the minion of fortune and the worm of the hour!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE minion of fortune and the worm of the hour, or in less cutting language, Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, the Golden Dustman, had become as much at home in his eminently aristocratic family mansion as he was likely ever to be. He could not but feel that, like an eminently aristocratic family cheese, it was much too large for his wants, and bred an infinite amount of parasites; but he was content to regard this drawback on his property as a sort of perpetual Legacy Duty. He felt the more resigned to it, forasmuch as Mrs. Boffin enjoyed herself completely, and Miss Bella was delighted.

That young lady was, no doubt, an acquisition to the Bcf-

fins. She was far too pretty to be unattractive anywhere, and far too quick of perception to be below the tone of her new career. Whether it improved her heart might be a matter of taste that was open to question; but as touching another matter of taste, its improvement of her appearance and manner, there could be no question whatever.

"An invaluable man is Rokesmith," said Mr. Boffin, after two or three months. "But I can't quite make him out."

Neither could Bella, so she found the subject rather interesting.

"He takes more care of my affairs, morning, noon, and night," said Mr. Boffin, "than fifty other men put together either could or would; and yet he has ways of his own that are like tying a scaffolding-pole right across the road, and bringing me up short when I am almost a-walking arm-in-arm with him."

"May I ask how so, sir?" inquired Bella.

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Boffin, "he won't meet any company here, but you. When we have visitors, I should wish him to have his regular place at the table like ourselves; but no, he won't take it."

"If he considers himself above it," said Miss Bella, with an airy toss of her head, "I should leave him alone."

"It ain't that, my dear," replied Mr. Boffin, thinking it over. "He don't consider himself above it."

"Perhaps he considers himself beneath it," suggested Bella. "If so, he ought to know best."

"No, my dear; nor it ain't that, neither. No," repeated Mr. Boffin, "Rokesmith's a modest man, but he don't consider himself beneath it."

"Then what does he consider, sir?" asked Bella.

"Dashed if I know!" said Mr. Boffin. "It seemed at first as if it was only Lightwood that he objected to meet. And now it seems to be everybody, except you."

"Oho!" thought Miss Bella. "Indeed! *That's* it, is it!" For Mr. Mortimer Lightwood had dined there two or three times, and she had met him elsewhere, and he had shown her some attention. "Rather cool in a Secretary—and Pa's lodger—to make me the subject of his jealousy!"

That Pa's daughter should be so contemptuous of Pa's

lodger was odd; but there were odder anomalies than that in the mind of the spoiled girl: the doubly spoiled girl: spoiled first by poverty, and then by wealth.

Yet it was not so very long ago that Bella had been fluttered by the discovery that this same Secretary and lodger seemed to like her. Ah! but the eminently aristocratic mansion and Mrs. Boffin's dressmaker had not come into play then.

"You never charge me, Miss Wilfer," said the Secretary, encountering her by chance alone in the great drawing-room, "with commissions for home. I shall always be happy to execute any commands you may have in that direction."

"Pray what may you mean, Mr. Rokesmith?" inquired Miss Bella, with languidly drooping eyelids.

"By home? I mean your father's house at Holloway."

She colored under the retort—so skillfully thrust that the words seemed to be merely a plain answer, in plain good faith—and said, rather more emphatically and sharply:

"What commissions and commands are you speaking of?"

"Only such little words of remembrance as I assume you send somehow or other," replied the Secretary with his former air. "It would be a pleasure to me if you would make me the bearer of them."

"I am going, sir," said Bella, looking at him as if he had reproved her, "to see them to-morrow."

"Is that," he asked, hesitating, "said to me, or to them?"

"To which you please."

"To both? Shall I make it a message?"

"You can if you like, Mr. Rokesmith. Message or no message, I am going to see them to-morrow."

"Then I will tell them so."

He lingered a moment, as though to give her the opportunity of prolonging the conversation if she wished. As she remained silent, he left her. Two incidents of the little interview were felt by Miss Bella herself, when alone again, to be very curious. The first was, that he unquestionably left her with a penitent air upon her, and a penitent feeling in her heart. The second was, that she had not had an

intention or a thought of going home, until she had announced it to him as a settled design.

"What can I mean by it, or what can he mean by it?" was her mental inquiry: "He has no right to any power over me, and how do I come to mind him when I don't care for him?"

Mrs. Boffin insisting that Bella should make to-morrow's expedition in the chariot, she went home in great grandeur.

The day was passing in the usual uncomfortable fashion when the front garden-gate clanked, and the Secretary was seen coming at a brisk pace up the steps. "Leave Me to open the door to him," said Mrs Wilfer, rising with stately resignation as she shook her head and dried her eyes; "we have at present no stipendiary girl to do so. We have nothing to conceal. If he sees traces of emotion on our cheeks, let him construe them as he may."

With those words she stalked out. In a few moments she stalked in again, proclaiming in her heraldic manner, "Mr. Rokesmith is the bearer of a packet for Miss Bella Wilfer."

Mr. Rokesmith followed close upon his name, and of course saw what was amiss. But he discreetly affected to see nothing, and addressed Miss Bella.

"Mr. Boffin intended to have placed this in the carriage for you this morning."

Bella took it in her hand, and thanked him.

"We have been quarreling here a little, Mr. Rokesmith, but not more than we used; you know our agreeable ways among ourselves. You find me just going. Good-bye, mamma, Good-bye, Lavvy!" And with a kiss for each Miss Bella turned to the door.

When Bella was seated in the carriage, she opened the little packet in her hand. It contained a pretty purse, and the purse contained a bank note for fifty pounds. "This shall be a joyful surprise for poor dear Pa," said Bella, "and I'll take it myself into the City!"

Near Mincing Lane she dispatched "the male domestic of Mrs. Boffin," in search of the counting-house of Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles, with a message importing that if R. Wilfer could come out, there was a lady waiting who would

be glad to speak with him. The delivery of these mysterious words from the mouth of a footman caused so great an excitement in the counting-house, that a youthful scout was instantly appointed to follow him, observe the lady, and come in with his report. Nor was the agitation by any means diminished, when the scout rushed back with the intelligence that the lady was "a slap-up gal in a bang-up chariot."

The Cherub with his pen behind his ear under his rusty hat, arrived at the carriage-door in a breathless condition.

"My dear child!" he panted, incoherently. "Good gracious me! What a lovely woman you are! I thought you had been unkind and forgotten your mother and sister."

"I have just been to see them, Pa dear."

"Oh! and how--how did you find your mother?" asked R. W., dubiously.

"Very disagreeable, Pa, and so was Lavvy. I was disagreeable too, Pa; we were all of us disagreeable together. But I want you to come and dine with me somewhere, Pa. Do, I beg and pray, get leave for the rest of the day, and come and pass it with me!"

"Well, my dear, I'll cut back and ask for leave."

Back came her father, more like a boy than ever, in his release from school. "All right, my dear. Leave given at once. Really very handsomely done!"

"Now find some quiet place, Pa, in which I can wait for you, while you go an errand for me after I send the carriage away, and ask no questions. You take this purse; you go to the nearest place where they keep everything of the very very best, ready made; you buy and put on the most beautiful suit of clothes, the most beautiful hat, and the most beautiful pair of bright boots (patent leather, Pa, mind!) that are to be got for money; and you come back to me."

After half an hour, he came back, so brilliantly transformed that Bella was obliged to walk round him in ecstatic admiration twenty times, before she could draw her arm through his, and delightedly squeeze it.

"Now, Pa," said Bella, hugging him close, "take this lovely woman out to dinner."

"Where shall we go, my dear?"

"Greenwich!" said Bella, valiantly. "And be sure you treat this lovely woman with everything of the best."

"Now, all the rest of this, Pa," said Bella after dinner rolling up the purse, hammering it small with her little fist on the table, and cramming it into one of the pockets of his new waistcoat, "is for you, to buy presents with for them at home, and to pay bills with, and to divide as you like, and spend exactly as you think proper."

Arrived at Mr. Boffin's door, Bella set him with his back against it, tenderly took him by the ears as convenient handles for her purpose, and kissed him until he knocked muffled knocks at the door with the back of his head. That done, she gayly parted from him.

Not so gayly, however, but that tears filled her eyes as he went away down the dark street. Not so gayly, but that she several times said, "Ah, poor little Pa! Ah, poor dear struggling shabby little Pa!" before she took heart to knock at the door. Not so gayly, but that the brilliant furniture seemed to stare her out of countenance as if it insisted on being compared with the dingy furniture at home. Not so gayly, but that she fell into very low spirits sitting late in her own room, and very heartily wept, as she wished, now that the deceased old John Harmon had never made a will about her, now that the deceased young John Harmon had lived to marry her. "Contradictory things to wish," said Bella, "but my life and fortunes are so contradictory altogether that what can I expect myself to be!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE Secretary, next morning, was informed that a youth waited in the hall who gave the name of Sloppy.

Mr. Sloppy being introduced, remained close to the door: revealing in various parts of his form many surprising, confounding, and incomprehensible buttons.

"I am glad to see you," said John Rokesmith, "I have been expecting you."

Sloppy explained that he had meant to come before, but that the Orphan (of whom he made mention as Our Johnny) had been ailing, and he had waited to report him well.

"Then he is well now?" said the Secretary.

"No he ain't," said Sloppy. "Must have took 'em from the Minders—them that come out upon him, and partickler his chest."

"This is unfortunate," said Rokesmith. "I must go and break it to Mrs. Boffin."

"Ah, my poor dear pretty little John Harmon!" exclaimed Mrs. Boffin. "You don't think he is in a very, very bad way, do you?"

Put upon his good faith, and finding it in collision with his inclinations, Sloppy threw back his head and uttered a mellifluous howl, rounded off with a sniff.

"So bad as that!" cried Mrs. Boffin. "It's not a right place for the poor child to stay in. Tell us, dear Mr. Rokesmith, what to do for the best."

He had already thought what to do, and the consultation was very short. He could pave the way, he said, in half an hour, and then they would go down to Brentford. "Pray take me," said Bella. Therefore a carriage was ordered, of capacity to take them all.

On the way down, they stopped at a toy-shop, and bought a noble charger, a description of whose points and trappings had on the last occasion conciliated the then worldly-minded orphan, and also a Noah's ark, and also a yellow bird with an artificial voice in him, and also a military doll so well dressed that if he had only been of life-size his brother-officers in the Guards might never have found him out. Bearing these gifts, they raised the latch of Betty Higden's door, and saw her sitting in the dimmest and furthest corner with poor Johnny in her lap.

"And how's my boy, Betty?" asked Mrs. Boffin, sitting down beside her.

"He's bad! He's bad!" said Betty. "I begin to be afeerd he'll not be yours any more than mine. All others belonging to him have gone to the Power and the Glory, and I have a mind that they're drawing him to them—leading him away."

"No, no, no," said Mrs. Boffin. "Is he asleep?"

"No, I think not. You're not asleep, my Johnny?"

"No," said Johnny, with a quiet air of pity for himself, and without opening his eyes.

"Here's the lady, Johnny, and the horse."

Johnny could bear the lady with complete indifference, but not the horse. Opening his heavy eyes, he slowly broke into a smile on beholding that splendid phenomenon, and wanted to take it in his arms. As it was much too big, it was put upon a chair where he could hold it by the mane and contemplate it. Which he soon forgot to do.

But Johnny murmured something with his eyes closed, and old Betty bent her ear to listen. The murmur was, "Who is the boofer lady?" Now, the boofer, or beautiful, lady was Bella; and whereas this notice from the poor baby would have touched her of itself, it was rendered more pathetic by the late melting of her heart to her poor little father, and their joke about the lovely woman. So Bella's behavior was very tender and very natural when she kneeled on the brick floor to clasp the child, and when the child, with a child's admiration of what is young and pretty, fondled the boofer lady.

"Now, my good dear Betty," said Mrs. Boffin, hoping that she saw her opportunity, and laying her hand persuasively on her arm; "we have come to remove Johnny from this cottage to where he can be taken better care of."

Instantly, and before another word could be spoken, the old woman started up with blazing eyes, and rushed at the door with the sick child.

"Stand away from me, every one of ye!" she cried out wildly. "I see what ye mean, now. Let me go my way, all of ye. I'd sooner kill the Pretty, and kill myself!"

Catching sight of Mrs. Boffin's wholesome face, she relented, and crouching down by the door and bending over her burden to hush it, said humbly: "Maybe my fears has put me wrong. If they have so, tell me, and the good Lord forgive me! I'm quick to take this fright, I know, and my head is summ'at light with wearying and watching."

"There, there, there!" returned Mrs. Boffin. "Come, come! Say no more of it, Betty. It was a mistake, a mistake. Any one of us might have made it in your place, and felt just as you do."

"The Lord bless ye!" said the old woman.

"Now, see, Betty," pursued the sweet compassionate

soul, "what I really did mean, and what I should have begun by saying out, if I had only been a little wiser and handier. We want to move Johnny to a place where there are none but children; a place set up on purpose for sick children; where the good doctors and nurses pass their lives with children, talk to none but children, touch none but children, comfort and cure none but children."

"Is there really such a place?"

"Yes, Betty, on my word, and you shall see it. If my home was a better place for the dear boy, I'd take him to it; but indeed indeed it's not."

"You shall take him," returned Betty, "where you will, my deary. I am not so hard, but that I believe your face and voice, and I will, as long as I can see and hear."

This victory gained, Rokesmith made haste to profit by it, for he saw how wofully time had been lost.

At the Children's Hospital, the gallant steed, the Noah's ark, the yellow bird, and the officer in the Guards, were made as welcome as their child-owner.

They were all carried up into a fresh airy room, and there Johnny came to himself, out of a sleep or a swoon or whatever it was, to find himself lying in a little quiet bed, with a little platform over his breast, on which were already arranged, to give him heart and urge him to cheer up, the Noah's ark, the noble steed, and the yellow bird; with the officer in the Guards doing duty over the whole, quite as much to the satisfaction of his country as if he had been upon Parade. And at the bed's head was a colored picture beautiful to see, representing as it were another Johnny seated on the knee of some Angel surely who loved little children.

A very little brother lying in the next bed with a broken leg, was so enchanted by this spectacle that his delight exalted its enthralling interest; and so came rest and sleep.

"I see you are not afraid to leave the dear child here, Betty," whispered Mrs. Boffin.

"No, ma'am. Most willingly, most thankfully, with all my heart and soul."

So, they kissed him, and left him there, and old Betty was to come back early in the morning, and nobody but Roke-

smith knew for certain how that the doctor had said, "This should have been days ago. Too late!"

But, Rokesmith knowing it, and knowing that his bearing it in mind would be acceptable thereafter to that good woman who had been the only light in the childhood of desolate John Harmon dead and gone, resolved that late at night he would go back to the bedside of John Harmon's namesake, and see how it fared with him.

The family whom God had brought together were not all asleep, but were all quiet. From bed to bed, a light womanly tread and a pleasant fresh face passed in the silence of the night. A little head would lift itself up into the softened light here and there, to be kissed as the face went by—for these little patients are very loving—and would then submit itself to be composed to rest again. The mite with the broken leg was restless, and moaned; but after a while turned his face towards Johnny's bed, to fortify himself with a view of the ark, and fell asleep. Over most of the beds, the toys were yet grouped as the children had left them when they last laid themselves down, and in their innocent grotesqueness and incongruity, they might have stood for the children's dreams.

The doctor came in too, to see how it fared with Johnny. And he and Rokesmith stood together, looking down with compassion on him.

"What is it, Johnny?" Rokesmith was the questioner, and put an arm round the poor baby as he made a struggle.

"Him!" said the little fellow. "Those!"

The doctor was quick to understand children, and, taking the horse, the ark, the yellow bird, and the man in the Guards, from Johnny's bed, softly placed them on that of his next neighbor, the mite with the broken leg.

With a weary and yet a pleased smile, and with an action as if he stretched his little figure out to rest, the child heaved his body on the sustaining arm, and seeking Rokesmith's face with his lips, said:

"A kiss for the boofer lady."

Having now bequeathed all he had to dispose of, and arranged his affairs in this world, Johnny, thus speaking, left it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NOT long afterward Mrs. Boffin called together her husband, Bella, and the Secretary, for a consultation.

"What I want to talk about," said she, "is this. Mr. and Mrs. Milvey have sent me the kindest note possible, offering to find me another little child to name and educate and bring up. Well. This has set me thinking."

("And she is a steam-ingen at it," murmured Mr. Boffin.)

"—This has set me thinking, I say," repeated Mrs. Boffin, cordially beaming under the influence of her husband's compliment, "and I have thought two things. First of all, that I have grown timid of reviving John Harmon's name. It's an unfortunate name, and I fancy I should reproach myself if I gave it to another dear child, and it proved again unlucky."

"Now, whether," said Mr. Boffin, gravely propounding a case for his Secretary's opinion; "whether one might call that a superstition?"

"It is a matter of feeling with Mrs. Boffin," said Roke-smith, gently. "The name has always been unfortunate. It has now this new unfortunate association connected with it. The name has died out. Why revive it? Might I ask Miss Wilfer what she thinks?"

"It has not been a fortunate name for me," said Bella, coloring—"or at least it was not, until it led to my being here—but that is not the point in my thoughts. As we had given the name to the poor child, and as the poor child took so lovingly to me, I think I should feel jealous of calling another child by it. I think I should feel as if the name had become endeared to me, and I had no right to use it so."

"And that's your opinion?" remarked Mr. Boffin, observant of the Secretary's face and again addressing him.

"I say again, it is a matter of feeling," returned the Secretary. "I think Miss Wilfer's feeling very womanly and pretty."

"Now, give us your opinion, Noddy," said Mrs. Boffin.

"My opinion, old lady, is your opinion."

"Then," said Mrs. Boffin, "we agree not to revive John Harmon's name; we have done with it."

"Laid it up as a remembrance," suggested Bella.

"Much better said, my dear; laid it up as a remembrance. Well then; I have been thinking if I take any orphan to provide for, let it not be a pet and a plaything for me, but a creature to be helped for its own sake."

"Not pretty then?" said Bella.

"No," returned Mrs. Boffin, stoutly.

"Nor prepossessing then?" said Bella.

"No," returned Mrs. Boffin. "Not necessarily so. That's as it may happen. A well-disposed boy comes in my way who may be even a little wanting in such advantages for getting on in life, but is honest and industrious and requires a helping hand and deserves it. If I am very much in earnest and determined to be unselfish, let me take care of *him*."

Here the footman appeared, and apologetically announced Sloppy.

The Council looked at one another, and paused. "Shall he be brought here, ma'am?" asked Rokesmith.

"Yes," said Mrs. Boffin.

The consideration of Mrs. Boffin had clothed Mr. Sloppy in a suit of black, on which the tailor had received personal directions from Rokesmith to expend the utmost cunning of his art, with a view to the concealment of the cohering and sustaining buttons. But so much more powerful were the frailties of Sloppy's form than the strongest resources of tailoring science, that he now stood before the Council, a perfect Argus in the way of buttons.

"And how is Betty, my good fellow?" said Mrs. Boffin.

"Thankee, mum," said Sloppy, "she do pretty nicely, and sending her dooty and many thanks for the tea and all favours and wishing to know the family's healths."

"Have you just come, Sloppy?"

"Yes, mum."

"Then you have not had your dinner yet?"

"No, mum. But I mean to it. For I ain't forgotten your handsome orders that I was never to go away without having had a good 'un off of meat and beer and pudding—no: there was four of 'em, for I reckoned 'em up when I had 'em; meat one, beer two, vegetables three, and which was four?—Why pudding, *he* was four!" Here Sloppy threw

his head back, opened his mouth wide, and laughed rapturously.

"How are the poor little Minders?" asked Mrs. Boffin.

"Striking right out, mum, and coming round beautiful."

Mrs. Boffin looked on the other three members of Council, and then said, beckoning with her finger:

"Sloppy."

"Yes, mum."

"Should you like to be always taken care of here, if you were industrious and deserving?"

"Oh, mum!—But there's Mrs. Higden," said Sloppy, checking himself in his raptures, drawing back, and shaking his head with very serious meaning. "There's Mrs. Higden. Mrs. Higden goes before all. None can ever be better friends to me than Mrs. Higden's been. And she must be turned for, must Mrs. Higden. Where would Mrs. Higden be if she warn't turned for?"

"You are as right as right can be, Sloppy," said Mrs. Boffin, "and far be it from me to tell you otherwise. It shall be seen to. If Betty Higden can be turned for all the same, you shall come here and be taken care of for life, and be made able to keep her in other ways than the turning."

That he might have room enough for his feelings, Sloppy threw back his head, opened his mouth wide, and uttered a dismal howl.

CHAPTER XXV.

LOVE at first sight is a trite expression quite sufficiently discussed; enough that in certain smouldering natures like Bradley Headstone's, that passion leaps into a blaze, and makes such head as fire does in a rage of wind, when other passions, but for its mastery, could be held in chains.

One evening he went his way toward the dolls' dressmaker's, brooding and brooding, and a sense of being vanquished in a struggle might have been pieced out of his worried face. Truly, in his breast there lingered a resentful shame to find himself defeated by this passion for Charley Hexam's sister, though in the very self-same moments he was concentrating himself upon the object of bringing the passion to a successful issue.

He appeared before the dolls' dressmaker, sitting alone at her work. "Oho!" thought that sharp young personage, "it's you, is it? I know your tricks and your manners, my friend!"

Lizzie Hexam arriving soon after showed some surprise on seeing Bradley Headstone there.

"Here's a perfectly disinterested person, Lizzie dear," said the knowing Miss Wren, "come to talk with you, for your own sake and your brother's. Think of that. I am sure there ought to be no third party present at anything so very kind and so very serious; and so, if you'll remove third party up-stairs, my dear, the third party will retire."

"She can do no better than stay where she is," returned Lizzie, laying her hand lightly on Miss Jenny's curls. And then to Bradley: "From Charley, sir?"

In an irresolute way, and stealing a clumsy look at her, Bradley rose to place a chair for her, and then returned to his own.

"Strictly speaking," said he, "I come from Charley, because I left him only a little while ago; but I am not commissioned by Charley. I come of my own spontaneous act. The fact is, the truth is, that Charley, having no secrets from me (to the best of my belief), has confided the whole of this matter to me."

He came to a stop, and Lizzie asked: "What matter, sir?"

"I thought," returned the schoolmaster, "that it might be so superfluous as to be almost impertinent, to enter upon a definition of it. My allusion was to this matter of your having put aside your brother's plans for you, and given the preference to those of Mr.—I believe the name is Mr. Eugene Wrayburn."

Nothing being said on the other side, he had to begin again, and began with new embarrassment.

"Your brother's plans were communicated to me when he first had them in his thoughts. In point of fact he spoke to me about them when I was last here—when we were walking back together, and when I—when the impression was fresh upon me of having seen his sister. I approved of his idea, both because your brother ought naturally to be the originator of any such scheme, and because I hoped to be

able to promote it. I should have had inexpressible pleasure, I should have taken inexpressible interest, in promoting it. Therefore I must acknowledge that when your brother was disappointed, I too was disappointed. I wish to avoid reservation or concealment, and I fully acknowledge that."

He appeared to have encouraged himself by having got so far. At all events he went on with much greater firmness and force of emphasis: though with a curious disposition to set his teeth, and with a curious tight-screwing movement of his right hand in the clenching palm of his left, like the action of one who was being physically hurt, and was unwilling to cry out.

"Your brother has taken the matter so much to heart that he has remonstrated (in my presence he remonstrated) with Mr. Eugene Wrayburn, if that be the name. He did so quite ineffectually; as any one not blinded to the real character of Mr.—Mr. Eugene Wrayburn—would readily suppose."

He looked at Lizzie again, and held the look. And his face turned from burning red to white, and from white back to burning red, and so for the time to lasting deadly white.

"Finally, I resolved to come here alone, and appeal to you, and entreat you to retract the course you have chosen, and instead of confiding in a mere stranger—a person of most insolent behavior to your brother and others—to prefer your brother and your brother's friend."

Lizzie Hexam had changed color when those changes came over him, and her face now expressed some anger, more dislike, and even a touch of fear. But she answered him very steadily.

"I cannot doubt, Mr. Headstone, that your visit is well meant. You have been so good a friend to Charley that I have no right to doubt it. I have nothing to tell Charley, but that I accepted the help to which he so much objects before he made any plans for me; or certainly before I knew of any. It was considerately and delicately offered, and there were reasons that had weight with me which should be as dear to Charley as to me. I have no more to say to Charley on this subject."

His lips trembled and stood apart, as he followed this re-

pudiation of himself, and limitation of her words to her brother.

"I should have told Charley, if he had come to me," she resumed, as though it were an after-thought, "that Jenny and I find our teacher very able and very patient, and that she takes great pains with us. So much so, that we have said to her we hope in a very little while to be able to go on by ourselves."

"I should like to ask you," said Bradley Headstone, grinding his words slowly out, as though they came from a rusty mill; "I should like to ask you, if I may without offense, whether you would have objected—no; rather, I should like to say, if I may without offense, that I wish I had had the opportunity of coming here with your brother and devoting my poor abilities and experience to your service."

"Thank you, Mr. Headstone."

"But I fear," he pursued, after a pause, furtively wrenching at the seat of his chair with one hand, as if he would have wrenched the chair to pieces, and gloomily observing her while her eyes were cast down, "that my humble services would not have found much favor with you?"

She made no reply, and the poor stricken wretch sat contending with himself in a heat of passion and torment. After a while he took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead and hands.

"There is only one thing more I had to say, but it is the most important. There is a reason against this matter, there is a personal relation concerned in this matter, not yet explained to you. It might—I don't say it would—it might—induce you to think differently. To proceed under the present circumstances is out of the question. Will you please come to the understanding that there shall be another interview on the subject."

"With Charley, Mr. Headstone?"

"With—well," he answered, breaking off, "yes! Say with him too. Will you please come to the understanding that there must be another interview under more favorable circumstances, before the whole case can be submitted?"

"I don't," said Lizzie, shaking her head, "understand your meaning, Mr. Headstone."

"Limit my meaning for the present," he interrupted, "to the whole case being submitted in another interview."

"What case, Mr. Headstone? What is wanting to it?"

"You—you shall be informed in the other interview." Then he said, as if in a burst of irrepressible despair, "I—I leave it all incomplete! There is a spell upon me, I think!" And then added, almost as if he asked for pity, "Good-night!"

He held out his hand. As she, with manifest hesitation, not to say reluctance, touched it, a strange tremble passed over him, and his face, so deadly white, was moved as by a stroke of pain. Then he was gone.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ROGUE RIDERHOOD dwelt deep and dark in Limehouse Hole, and had it not been for the daughter whom he often mentioned, Mr. Riderhood might have found the Hole a mere grave as to any means it would yield him of getting a living. But Miss Pleasant Riderhood had some little position and connection in Limehouse Hole. Upon the smallest of small scales, she was an unlicensed pawnbroker, keeping what was popularly called a Leaving Shop, by lending insignificant sums on insignificant articles of property deposited with her as security.

She shared with most of the lady inhabitants of the Hole, the peculiarity that her hair was a ragged knot, constantly coming down behind, and that she never could enter upon any undertaking without first twisting it into place. On a cold windy evening, being newly come to the threshold to take a look out of doors, she was winding herself up with both hands after this fashion.

It was a wretched little shop, with a roof that any man standing in it could touch with his hand; yet in its ill-lighted window was displayed the inscription SEAMAN'S BOARDING-HOUSE.

Pleasant Riderhood stood at the door, when a man crossed the street quickly and stood close before her.

"Is your father at home?" said he.

"I think he is," returned Pleasant, dropping her arms; "come in."

It was a tentative reply, the man having a seafaring appearance. Her father was not at home, and Pleasant knew it. "Take a seat by the fire; men of your calling are always welcome here."

"Thankee," said the man.

His manner was the manner of a sailor, and his hands were the hands of a sailor, except that they were smooth.

"Might you be looking for a Boarding-House?" Pleasant inquired.

"I don't rightly know my plans yet," returned the man.

"You ain't looking for a Leaving Shop?"

"No," said the man.

"No," assented Pleasant, "you've got too much of an outfit on you for that. But if you should want either, this is both."

"Ay, ay!" said the man, glancing round the place. "I know. I've been here before."

"What did you do here when you were here before?" asked Pleasant. "For I don't remember you."

"It's not at all likely you should. I only stood at the door, one night—on the lower step there—while a shipmate of mine looked in to speak to your father. I remember the place well." Looking very curiously round it.

"Might that have been long ago?"

"Ay, a goodish bit ago. When I came off my last voyage."

"Then you have not been to sea lately?"

"No. Been in the sick bay since then, and been employed ashore."

"Then, to be sure, that accounts for your hands."

The man with a keen look, a quick smile, and a change of manner, caught her up. "You're a good observer. Yes. That accounts for my hands."

The conversation had arrived at a crisis to justify Miss Pleasant's hair in tumbling down. It tumbled down accordingly, and she twisted it up, looking from under her bent forehead at the man. In taking stock of his familiarly worn rough-weather nautical clothes, piece by piece, she took stock of a formidable knife in a sheath at his waist ready to his hand, and of a whistle hanging round his neck, and of a

short jagged knotted club with a loaded head that peeped out of a pocket of his loose outer jacket or frock. He sat quietly looking at her; but, with these appendages partially revealing themselves, and with a quantity of bristling oak-um-colored head and whisker, he had a formidable appearance.

"To wile away the time till your father comes," he said,—"pray is there much robbing and murdering of seamen about the water-side now?"

"No," said Pleasant.

"Any?"

"Complaints of that sort are sometimes made, about Ratcliffe and Wapping, and up that way. But who knows how many are true?"

"To be sure. I'll tell you why I ask," pursued the visitor, looking up from the fire. "I was once beset that way myself, and left for dead."

"No?" said Pleasant. "Where did it happen?"

"It happened," returned the man, with a ruminative air, as he drew his right hand across his chin, and dipped the other in the pocket of his rough outer coat, "it happened somewhere about here as I reckon. I don't think it can have been a mile from here."

"Were you drunk?" asked Pleasant.

"I was muddled, but not with fair drinking. I had not been drinking, you understand. A mouthful did it."

Pleasant, with a grave look, shook her head. "Fair trade is one thing," said she, "but that's another. No one has a right to carry on with Jack in *that* way."

"The sentiment does you credit," returned the man, with a grim smile; and added in a mutter, "the more so, as I believe it's not your father's.—Yes, I had a bad time of it, that time. I lost everything, and had a sharp struggle for my life, weak as I was."

"Did you get the parties punished?" asked Pleasant.

"A tremendous punishment followed," said the man, more seriously; "but it was not of my bringing about."

"Of whose then?" asked Pleasant.

The man pointed upward with his forefinger, and, slowly recovering that hand, settled his chin in it again as he looked at the fire.

"Anyways," said the damsel, "I am glad punishment followed, and I say so."

But she was here interrupted by her father's voice exclaiming angrily, "Now, Poll Parrot!" and by her father's hat being heavily flung from his hand and striking her face.

"Blest if I believe such a Poll Parrot as you was ever learned to speak!" growled Mr. Riderhood. "Ain't you got nothing to do but fold your arms and stand a Poll-Parroting all night?"

"Let her alone," urged the man. "She was only speaking to me."

"And who may *you* be, and what may *you* want?"

"How can I tell you until you are silent?" returned the other, fiercely.

"Well," said Mr. Riderhood, quailing a little, "I am willing to be silent for the purpose of hearing. But don't Poll-Parrot me."

"Are you thirsty, you?" the man asked, in the same fierce short way, after returning his look.

"Why nat'rally," said Mr. Riderhood, "ain't I always thirsty!"

"What will you drink?" demanded the man.

"Sherry wine," returned Mr. Riderhood, in the same sharp tone, "if you're capable of it."

The man put his hand in his pocket, took out half a sovereign, and begged of Miss Pleasant that she would fetch a bottle. "With the cork undrawn," he added, emphatically, looking at her father.

"I'll take my Alfred David," muttered Mr. Riderhood, slowly relaxing into a dark smile, "that you know a move. Do *I* know *you*? N—n—no, I don't know you."

The man replied, "No, you don't know me." And so they stood looking at one another surlily enough, until Pleasant came back.

The visitor first held the bottle against the light of the candle, and next examined the top of the cork. Satisfied that it had not been tampered with, he slowly took from his breastpocket a rusty clasp-knife, and, with a corkscrew in the handle, opened the wine. That done, he looked at the cork, unscrewed it from the corkscrew, laid each separately

on the table, and, with the end of the sailor's knot of his neckerchief, dusted the inside of the neck of the bottle. All this with great deliberation.

At first Riderhood had sat with his glass extended at arm's length for filling, but gradually his arm reverted home to him, and his glass was lowered and lowered until he rested it upon the table. His attention became concentrated on the knife. And now, as the man held out the bottle to fill all round, Riderhood stood up, leaned over the table to look closer at the knife, and stared from it to him.

"What's the matter?" asked the man.

"Why, I know that knife!" said Riderhood.

"Yes, I dare say you do."

"That there knife was the knife of a seaman named George Radfoot."

"It was."

"That seaman was well beknown to me."

"He was."

"What's come to him?"

"Death has come to him. Death came to him in an ugly shape. He looked," said the man, "very horrible after it."

"Arter what?" said Riderhood, with a frowning stare.

"After he was killed."

"Killed? Who killed him?"

The man only answered with a shrug.

"You don't mean to tell a honest man—" Riderhood was recommencing with his empty glass in his hand, when his eye became fascinated by the stranger's outer coat. He leaned across the table to see it nearer, touched the sleeve, turned the cuff to look at the sleeve-lining (the man, in his perfect composure, offering not the least objection), and exclaimed, "It's my belief as this here coat was George Radfoot's too!"

"You are right. He wore it the last time you ever saw him, and the last time you ever will see him—in this world."

"It's my belief you mean to tell me to my face you killed him!" exclaimed Riderhood: but, nevertheless, allowing his glass to be filled again.

The man only answered with another shrug, and showed no symptom of confusion.

"Wish I may die if I know what to be up to with this

chap!" said Riderhood, after staring at him, and tossing his last glassful down his throat. "Let's know what to make of you. Say something plain."

"I will," returned the other, leaning forward across the table, and speaking in a low impressive voice. "What a liar you are! When you went to that lawyer yonder in the Temple with that invented story, you might have had your strong suspicions of a friend of your own, you know. I think you had, you know."

"Me my suspicions? Of what friend?"

"Tell me again whose knife was this?" demanded the man.

"It was possessed by, and was the property of—him as I have made mention on," said Riderhood.

"Tell me again whose coat was this!"

"That there article of clothing likeways belonged to, and was wore by—him as I have made mention on."

"I suspect that you gave him the credit of the deed, and of keeping cleverly out of the way. But there was small cleverness in *his* keeping out of the way. The cleverness would have been, to have got back for one single instant to the light of the sun."

"Things is come to a pretty pass," growled Mr. Riderhood, rising to his feet, goaded to stand at bay, "when bullyers as is wearing dead men's clothes, and bullyers as is armed with dead men's knives, is to come into the houses of honest live men, getting their livings by the sweats of their brows, and is to make these here sort of charges with no rhyme and no reason, neither the one nor yet the other! Why should I have had my suspicions of him?"

"Because you knew him," replied the man; "because you had been one with him, and knew his real character under a fair outside; because on the night which you had afterwards reason to believe to be the very night of the murder, he came in here, within an hour of his having left his ship in the docks, and asked you in what lodgings he could find room. Was there no stranger with him?"

"I'll take my world-without-end everlasting Alfred David that you warn't with him," answered Riderhood. "You talk big, you do, but things look pretty black against your—"

self, to my thinking. You charge agin me that George Radfoot got lost sight of, and was no more thought of. What's that for a sailor? You tell me George Radfoot got killed. I ask you who done it and how you know it. You carry his knife and you wear his coat. Now then! I want to know how George Radfoot come by his death, and how you come by his kit?"

"If you ever do know, you won't know now."

"And next I want to know," proceeded Riderhood; "whether you mean to charge that what-you-may-call-it murder—"

"Harmon murder, father," suggested Pleasant.

"No Poll-Parroting!" he vociferated, in return. "Keep your mouth shut!—I want to know, you sir, whether you charge that there crime on George Radfoot?"

"If you ever do know, you won't know now."

"Perhaps you done it yourself?" said Riderhood, with a threatening action.

"I alone know," returned the man, sternly shaking his head, "the mysteries of that crime. I alone know that your trumped-up story cannot possibly be true. I alone know that it must be altogether false, and that you must know it to be altogether false. I come here to-night to tell you so much of what I know, and no more."

"Shut the shop-door!" said Riderhood to his daughter. "And turn the key and stand by it! If you know all this, you sir, why han't you gone to Lawyer Lightwood?"

"That, also, is alone known to myself."

"Don't you know that, if you didn't do the deed, what you say you could tell is worth from five to ten thousand pound?" asked Riderhood.

"I know it very well, and when I claim the money you shall share it. I know it as well as I know that you and George Radfoot were one together in more than one dark business; and as well as I know that you, Roger Riderhood, conspired against an innocent man for blood-money; and as well as I know that I can—and that I swear I will!—give you up on both scores, and be the proof against you in my own person, if you defy me!"

"Is it fair," cried Mr. Riderhood, propitiatingly and crawl-

ingly, "to talk of my defying you afore ever you say what you want of me?"

"I don't want much," said the man. "This accusation of yours must not be left half made and half unmade. What was done for the blood-money must be thoroughly undone."

"Well; but Shipmate—"

"Don't call me Shipmate," said the man.

"Captain, then," urged Mr. Riderhood; "there! You won't object to Captain. It's a honorable title, and you fully look it. Captain! Ain't the man dead? Now I ask you fair. Ain't Gaffer dead?"

"Well," returned the other, with impatience, "yes, he is dead. What then?"

"Can words hurt a dead man, Captain? I only ask you fair."

"They can hurt the memory of a dead man, and they can hurt his living children. It is dreadful that any stigma should attach to them," said the visitor, whom the consideration rendered so uneasy that he rose, and paced to and fro, muttering, "Dreadful! Unforeseen! How could it be foreseen! You shall sign a statement that it was all utterly false, and the poor girl shall have it. I will bring it with me for your signature, when I come again."

"When might you be expected, Captain?" inquired Riderhood, again dubiously getting between him and the door.

"Quite soon enough for you. I shall not disappoint you; don't be afraid."

"Might you be inclined to leave any name, Captain?"

"No, not at all. I have no such intention," and he passed out of the shop, nodding to Pleasant kindly.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE wind was blowing so hard when the visitor came out at the shop-door into the darkness and dirt of Limehouse Hole, that it almost blew him in again. Indifferent to the weather, and even preferring it to better weather for its clearance of the streets, the man looked about him with a scrutinizing glance. "Thus much I know," he murmured. "I have never been here since that night, and never

was here before that night, but thus much I recognize. I wonder which way did we take when we came out of that shop. We turned to the right as I have turned, but I can recall no more. Did we go by this alley? Or down that lane?"

He tried both, but both confused him equally, and he came straying back to the same spot. "I remember there were poles pushed out of upper windows on which clothes were drying, and I remember a low public-house, and the sound flowing down a narrow passage belonging to it, of the scraping of a fiddle and the shuffling of feet. But here are all these things in the lane, and here are all these things in the alley. And I have nothing else in my mind but a wall, a dark door-way, a flight of stairs, and a room."

He tried a new direction, but made nothing of it; walls, dark door-ways, flights of stairs and rooms, were too abundant. And, like most people so puzzled, he again and again described a circle, and found himself at the point from which he had begun.

Here he ceased to be the oakum-headed, oakum-whiskered man on whom Miss Pleasant Riderhood had looked, and, allowing for his being still wrapped in a nautical overcoat, became as like that same lost wanted Mr. Julius Handford as never man was like another in this world. Yet in that same moment he was the Secretary also, Mr. Boffin's Secretary. For John Rokesmith, too, was as like that same lost wanted Mr. Julius Handford as never man was like another in this world.

"I have no clue to the scene of my death," said he. "When I came back to England, I came back, shrinking from my father's money, shrinking from my father's memory, mistrustful of being forced on a mercenary wife, mistrustful of my father's intention in thrusting that marriage on me, mistrustful that I was already growing avaricious, mistrustful that I was slackening in gratitude to the two dear noble honest friends who had made the only sunlight in my childish life or that of my heart-broken sister. Now, stop, and so far think it out, John Harmon. Is that so? That is exactly so.

"On board serving as third mate was George Radfoot. I knew nothing of him. His name first became known to me

about a week before we sailed, through my being accosted by one of the ship-agent's clerks as 'Mr. Radfoot.' It was one day when I had gone aboard to look to my preparations, and the clerk, coming behind me as I stood on deck, tapped me on the shoulder, and said, 'Mr. Radfoot, look here,' referring to some papers that he had in his hand. And my name first became known to Radfoot through another clerk within a day or two, and while the ship was yet in port, coming up behind him, tapping him on the shoulder and beginning, 'I beg your pardon, Mr. Harmon—.'

"A sociable word or two on these mistakes became an easy introduction between us, and the weather was hot, and he helped me to a cool cabin on deck alongside his own, and his first school had been at Brussels as mine had been, and he had learned French as I had learned it, and he had a little history of himself to relate—God only knows how much of it true, and how much of it false—that had its likeness to mine. I had been a seaman too. So we got to be confidential together, and the more easily yet, because he and every one on board had known by general rumor what I was making the voyage to England for. By such degrees and means, he came to the knowledge of my uneasiness of mind, and of its setting at that time in the direction of desiring to see and form some judgment of my allotted wife, before she could possibly know me for myself; also to try Mrs. Boffin and give her a glad surprise. So the plot was made out of our getting common sailors' dresses (as he was able to guide me about London), and throwing ourselves in Bella Wilfer's neighborhood, and trying to put ourselves in her way, and doing whatever chance might favor on the spot, and seeing what came of it. If nothing came of it, I should be no worse off, and there would merely be a short delay in my presenting myself to Lightwood. I have all these facts right? Yes. They are all accurately right.

"His advantage in all this was, that for a time I was to be lost. It might be for a day or for two days, but I must be lost sight of on landing, or there would be recognition, anticipation, and failure. Therefore, I disembarked with my valise in my hand—as Potterson the steward and Mr. Jacob

Kibble my fellow-passenger afterwards remembered—and waited for him in the dark by that very Limehouse Church which is now behind me.

“As I had always shunned the port of London, I only knew the church through his pointing out its spire from on board. Perhaps I might recall, if it were any good to try, the way by which I went to it alone from the river; but how we two went from it to Riderhood’s shop, I don’t know—any more than I know what turns we took and doubles we made, after we left it.

“When we stopped at Riderhood’s, and he asked that scoundrel a question or two, purporting to refer only to the lodging-houses in which there was accommodation for us, had I the least suspicion of him? None. Certainly none until afterwards when I held the clue. I think he must have got from Riderhood in a paper, the drug, or whatever it was, that afterwards stupefied me, but I am far from sure. All I felt safe in charging on him to-night, was old companionship in villainy between them. But I am not clear about the drug. I remember his changing a small folded paper from one pocket to another, after we came out, which he had not touched before. I now know Riderhood to have been previously taken up for being concerned in the robbery of an unlucky seaman, to whom some such poison had been given.

“It is my conviction that we cannot have gone a mile from that shop, before we came to the wall, the dark doorway, the flight of stairs, and the room. The night was particularly dark, and it rained hard. As I think the circumstances back, I hear the rain splashing on the stone pavement of the passage, which was not under cover. The room overlooked the river, or a dock, or a creek, and the tide was out. Being possessed of the time down to that point, I know by the hour that it must have been about low water; but while the coffee was getting ready, I drew back the curtain (a dark-brown curtain), and, looking out, knew by the kind of reflection below, of the few neighboring lights, that they were reflected in tidal mud.

“He had carried under his arm a canvas bag, containing a suit of his clothes. I had no change of outer clothes with

me, as I was to buy slops. 'You are very wet, Mr. Harmon,'—I can hear him saying—'and I am quite dry under this good waterproof coat. Put on these clothes of mine. You may find on trying them that they will answer your purpose to-morrow, as well as the slops you mean to buy, or better. While you change, I'll hurry the hot coffee.' When he came back, I had his clothes on, and there was a black man with him, wearing a linen jacket, like a steward, who put the smoking coffee on the table in a tray and never looked at me. I am so far literal and exact? Literal and exact, I am certain.

"Now, I pass to sick and deranged impressions; they are so strong, that I rely upon them; but there are spaces between them that I know nothing about, and they are not pervaded by any idea of time.

"I had drunk some coffee, when to my sense of sight he began to swell immensely, and something urged me to rush at him. We had a struggle near the door. He got from me, through my not knowing where to strike, in the whirling round of the room, and the flashing of flames of fire between us. I dropped down. Lying helpless on the ground, I was turned over by a foot. I was dragged by the neck into a corner. I heard men speak together. I was turned over by other feet. I saw a figure like myself lying dressed in my clothes on a bed. What might have been, for anything I knew, a silence of days, weeks, months, years, was broken by a violent wrestling of men all over the room. The figure like myself was assailed, and my valise was in its hand. I was trodden upon and fallen over. I heard a noise of blows, and thought it was a wood-cutter cutting down a tree. I could not have said that my name was John Harmon—I could not have thought it—I didn't know it—but when I heard the blows, I thought of the wood-cutter and his axe, and had some dead idea that I was lying in a forest.

"This is still correct? Still correct, with the exception that I cannot possibly express it to myself without using the word I. But it was not I. There was no such thing as I, within my knowledge.

"It was only after a downward slide through something like a tube, and then a great noise and a sparkling and

crackling as of fires, that the consciousness came upon me, 'This is John Harmon drowning! John Harmon, struggle for your life. John Harmon, call on Heaven and save yourself!' I think I cried it out aloud in a great agony, and then a heavy horrid unintelligible something vanished, and it was I who was struggling there alone in the water.

"I was very weak and faint, frightfully oppressed with drowsiness, and driving fast with the tide. Looking over the black water, I saw the lights racing past me on the two banks of the river, as if they were eager to be gone and leave me dying in the dark. Guiding myself safely with Heaven's assistance before the fierce set of the water, I at last caught at a boat moored, one of a tier of boats at a causeway, I was sucked under her, and came up, only just alive, on the other side.

"Was I long in the water? Long enough to be chilled to the heart, but I don't know how long. Yet the cold was merciful, for it was the cold night air and the rain that restored me from a swoon on the stones of the causeway. They naturally supposed me to have toppled in, drunk, when I crept to the public-house it belonged to; for I had no notion where I was, and could not articulate—through the poison having affected my speech—and I supposed the night to be the previous night, as it was still dark and raining. But I had lost twenty-four hours.

"I have checked the calculation often, and it must have been two nights that I lay recovering in that public-house. Let me see. Yes. I am sure it was while I lay in that bed there, that the thought entered my head of turning the danger I had passed through, to the account of being for some time supposed to have disappeared mysteriously, and of proving Bella.

"I could not have done it, but for the fortune in the water-proof belt round my body. Not a great fortune, forty and odd pounds for the inheritor of a hundred and odd thousand! But it was enough. Without it I must have disclosed myself.

"Some twelve days I lived at that hotel. Going out that night to walk, I found a crowd assembled round a placard. It described myself, John Harmon, as found dead and muti-

lated in the river, under circumstances of strong suspicion, described my dress, described the papers in my pockets, and stated where I was lying for recognition. In a wild incautious way I hurried there, and there—with the horror of the death I had escaped before my eyes in its most appalling shape, added to the inconceivable horror tormenting me at that time when the poisonous stuff was strongest on me—I perceived that Radfoot had been murdered by some unknown hands for the money for which he would have murdered me, and that probably we had both been shot into the river from the same dark place into the same dark tide, when the stream ran deep and strong.

“The Inquest declared me dead; the Government proclaimed me dead; I could not listen at my fireside for five minutes to the outer noises, but it was borne into my ears that I was dead.

“So John Harmon died, and Julius Handford disappeared, and John Rokesmith was born. John Rokesmith’s intent to-night has been to repair a wrong that he could never have imagined possible, coming to his ears through the Lightwood talk related to him, and which he is bound by every consideration to remedy. In that intent John Rokesmith will persevere, as his duty is.

“Now, is it all thought out? Nothing omitted? Should John Harmon come to life?

“If yes, why? If no, why?

“Take yes, first. To enlighten human Justice concerning the offense of one far beyond it who may have a living mother. To enlighten it with the lights of a stone passage, a flight of stairs, a brown window-curtain, and a black man. To come into possession of my father’s money, and with it sordidly to buy a beautiful creature whom I love—I cannot help it; reason has nothing to do with it; but who would as soon love me for my own sake, as she would love the beggar at the corner.

“Now, take no. Because he has passively allowed dear old faithful friends to pass into possession of the property. Because he sees them happy with it, making a good use of it, effacing the old rust and tarnish on the money. Because they have virtually adopted Bella, and will provide for her.

Because there is affection enough in her nature, and warmth enough in her heart, to develop into something enduringly good, under favorable conditions. Because her faults have been intensified by her place in my father's will, and she is already growing better. Because her marriage with John Harmon, after what I have heard from her own lips, would be a shocking mockery, of which both she and I must always be conscious, and which would degrade her in her mind, and me in mine, and each of us in the other's. Because if John Harmon comes to life and does not marry her, the property falls into the very hands that hold it now.

"What course for me then? This. To live the same quiet Secretary life, until they shall have become more accustomed to their altered state, and until the great swarm of swindlers shall have found newer prey.

"That I may never, in the days to come afar off, have any weak misgiving that Bella might, in any contingency, have taken me for my own sake if I had plainly asked her, I *will* plainly ask her: proving beyond all question what I already know too well. And now it is all thought out, from the beginning to the end, and my mind is easier."

The living-dead man, in thus communing with himself, had regarded neither the wind nor the way, and had resisted the former as instinctively as he had pursued the latter. But being now come into the City, where there was a coach-stand, he decided to go first to Mr. Boffin's house.

He found that Mr. and Mrs. Boffin were out, but that Miss Wilfer was in the drawing-room. Miss Wilfer had remained at home, in consequence of not feeling very well, and had inquired in the evening if Mr. Rokesmith were in his room.

"Make my compliments to Miss Wilfer, and say I am here now."

Miss Wilfer's compliments came down in return, and if it were not too much trouble, would Mr. Rokesmith be so kind as to come up before he went?

"Dear me! Are you not well, Mr. Rokesmith?"

"Yes, quite well. I was sorry to hear, when I came in, that *you* were not."

"A mere nothing. I had a headache—gone now—and

was not quite fit for a hot theatre, so I stayed at home. I asked you if you were not well, because you look so white."

"Do I? I have had a busy evening."

"Mr. Rokesmith," said Bella, taking up her work, and inspecting it all round the corners, "I wanted to say something to you when I could have the opportunity, as an explanation why I was rude to you the other day. You have no right to think ill of me, sir."

"You don't know how well I think of you, Miss Wilfer."

"Truly you must have a very high opinion of me, Mr. Rokesmith, when you believe that in prosperity I neglect and forget my old home."

"Do I believe so?"

"You *did*, sir, at any rate," returned Bella.

"I took the liberty of reminding you of a little omission into which you had fallen—insensibly and naturally fallen. It was no more than that."

"And I beg leave to ask you, Mr. Rokesmith," said Bella, "why you took that liberty?—I hope there is no offense in the phrase; it is your own, remember."

"Because I am truly, deeply, profoundly interested in you, Miss Wilfer. Because I wish to see you always at your best. Because I—shall I go on?"

"No, sir," returned Bella, with a burning face, "you have said more than enough. I beg that you will *not* go on. If you have any generosity, any honor, you will say no more. I wish to speak to you, sir, once for all, and I don't know how to do it. I have sat here all this evening, wishing to speak to you, and determined to speak to you, and feeling that I must. I beg for a moment's time."

He remained silent, and she remained with her face averted, sometimes making a slight movement as if she would turn and speak. At length she did so.

"You know how I am situated here, sir, and you know how I am situated at home. I must speak to you for myself, since there is no one about me whom I could ask to do so. It is not generous in you, it is not honorable in you, to conduct yourself towards me as you do."

"Is it ungenerous or dishonorable to be devoted to you; fascinated by you?"

"Preposterous!" said Bella.

The late John Harmon might have thought it rather a contemptuous and lofty word of repudiation.

"I now feel obliged to go on," pursued the Secretary, "though it were only in self-explanation and self-defense. I hope, Miss Wilfer, that it is not unpardonable—even in me—to make an honest declaration of an honest devotion to you."

"An honest declaration!" repeated Bella, with emphasis.

"Is it otherwise?"

"I must request, sir," said Bella, taking refuge in a touch of timely resentment, "that I may not be questioned. You must excuse me if I decline to be cross-examined."

"Oh, Miss Wilfer, this is hardly charitable. I ask you nothing but what your own emphasis suggests. However, I waive even that question. But what I have declared, I take my stand by. I cannot recall the avowal of my earnest and deep attachment to you, and I do not recall it."

"I reject it, sir," said Bella.

"I should be blind and deaf if I were not prepared for the reply. Forgive my offense, for it carries its punishment with it."

"What punishment?" asked Bella.

"Is my present endurance none? But excuse me; I did not mean to cross-examine you again."

"You take advantage of a hasty word of mine," said Bella, with a little sting of self-reproach, "to make me seem—I don't know what. I spoke without consideration when I used it. If that was bad, I am sorry; but you repeat it after consideration, and that seems to me to be at least no better. For the rest, I beg it may be understood, Mr. Rokesmith, that there is an end of this between us, now and for ever."

"Now and for ever," he repeated.

"Yes. I appeal to you, sir," proceeded Bella, with increasing spirit, "not to pursue me. I appeal to you not to take advantage of your position in this house to make my position in it distressing and disagreeable. I appeal to you to discontinue your habit of making your misplaced attentions as plain to Mrs. Boffin as to me."

"Have I done so?"

"I should think you have," replied Bella. "In any case it is not your fault if you have not, Mr. Rokesmith."

"I hope you are wrong in that impression. I should be very sorry to have justified it. I think I have not. For the future there is no apprehension. It is all over."

"I am much relieved to hear it," said Bella. "I have far other views in life, and why should you waste your own?"

"Mine!" said the Secretary. "My life! Pardon me, Miss Wilfer," he proceeded, when their eyes met; "you have used some hard words, for which I do not doubt you have a justification in your mind, that I do not understand. Ungenerous and dishonorable. In what?"

"You know," retorted Bella, with her old indignation rising, "the history of my being here at all. I have heard Mr. Boffin say that you are master of every line and word of that will, as you are master of all his affairs. And was it not enough that I should have been willed away like a horse, or a dog, or a bird; but must you too begin to dispose of me in your mind, and speculate in me, as soon as I had ceased to be the talk and the laugh of the town? Am I for ever to be made the property of strangers?"

"Believe me, you are wonderfully mistaken."

"I should be glad to know it," answered Bella.

"I doubt if you ever will. Good-night. Of course I shall be careful to conceal any traces of this interview from Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, as long as I remain here. Trust me, what you have complained of is at an end for ever."

"I am glad I have spoken, then, Mr. Rokesmith. It has been painful and difficult, but it is done. If I have hurt you, I hope you will forgive me. I am inexperienced and impetuous, and I have been a little spoiled; but I really am not so bad as I dare say I appear, or as you think me."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ARRIVING at the Boffin mansion the next morning, the Secretary found Betty Higden waiting for him.

"I should thank you kindly, sir," said Betty, "if I might make so bold as to have a word or two wi' you."

She should have as many words as she liked, he told her; and took her into his room, and made her sit down.

"'Tis concerning Sloppy, sir. And that's how I come here by myself. Not wishing him to know what I'm a-going to say to you, I got the start of him early and walked up. 'Tis just this, sir. It can't be reasoned out of his head by any powers of mine but what that he can do right by your kind lady and gentleman and do his work for me, both together. Now, he can't. To give himself up to being put in the way of arning a good living and getting on, he must give me up. Well, he won't."

"I respect him for it," said Rokesmith.

"Do ye, sir? I don't know but what I do myself. Still that don't make it right to let him have his way. So as he won't give me up, I'm a-going to give him up."

"How, Betty?"

"I'm a-going to run away from him. 'Tis a poor living and a hard as is to be got out of this work that I'm a doing now, and but for Sloppy I don't know as I should have held to it this long. But it did just keep us on, the two together. Now that I'm alone—with even Johnny gone—I'd far sooner be upon my feet and tiring of myself out, than a sitting folding and folding by the fire. And I'll tell you why. There's a deadness steals over me at times, that the kind of life favors and I don't like. I'd far better be a-walking than a-getting numbed and dreary. I'm a good fair knitter, and can make many little things to sell. The loan from your lady and gentleman of twenty shillings to fit out a basket with, would be a fortune for me. Trudging round the country and tiring of myself out, I shall keep the deadness off, and get my own bread by my own labor."

"And this is your plan for running away?"

"Show me a better! My deary, show me a better! Why, I know very well," said old Betty Higden, "and you know very well, that your lady and gentleman would set me up like a queen for the rest of my life, if so be that we could make it right among us to have it so. But we can't make it right among us to have it so. I've never took charity yet, nor yet has any one belonging to me."

"And to be sure," added the Secretary, as a comfort for her, "Sloppy will be eagerly looking forward to his opportunity of being to you what you have been to him."

"Trust him for that, sir!" said Betty, cheerfully.

The Secretary felt that there was no gainsaying what was urged by this brave old heroine, and he presently repaired to Mrs. Boffin and recommended her to let Betty Higden have her way, at all events for the time. "It would be far more satisfactory to your kind heart, I know, to provide for her, but it may be a duty to respect this independent spirit."

"*Must* it be done?" asked Mrs. Boffin.

"I think it must."

After discussion it was agreed that it should be done, and Mrs. Boffin summoned Bella to note down the little purchases that were necessary to set Betty up in trade.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE schoolmaster and the pupil emerged upon the Leadenhall Street region, spying eastward for Lizzie. Being something too soon in their arrival, they lurked at a corner, waiting for her to appear.

"Here she comes, Mr. Headstone! Let us go forward and meet her."

She greeted her brother with the usual warmth, and touched the extended hand of Bradley.

"Why, where are you going, Charley, dear?"

"Nowhere. We came on purpose to meet you."

"To meet me, Charley?"

"Yes. We are going to walk with you. But don't let us take the great leading streets where every one walks, and we can't hear ourselves speak. Let us go by the quiet back-ways. Here's a large paved court by this church, and quiet, too. Let us go up here."

"But it's not in the way, Charley."

"Yes it is," said the boy, petulantly. "It's in my way, and my way is yours."

She had not released his hand, and still holding it, looked at him with a kind of appeal. He avoided her eyes, under pretense of saying, "Come along, Mr. Headstone." Bradley walked at his side—not at hers—and the brother and sister walked hand in hand. The court brought them to a church-yard; a paved square court, with a raised bank of earth about it.

They paced the whole of this place once, in a constrained and uncomfortable manner, when the boy stopped and said :

"Lizzie, Mr. Headstone has something to say to you. I don't wish to be an interruption either to him or to you, and so I'll go and take a little stroll and come back. I know in a general way what Mr. Headstone intends to say, and I very highly approve of it, as I hope—and indeed I do not doubt—you will. I need not tell you, Lizzie, that I am under great obligations to Mr. Headstone, and that I am very anxious for Mr. Headstone to succeed in all he undertakes. As I hope—and as, indeed, I don't doubt—you must be."

"Charley," returned his sister, detaining his hand as he withdrew it, "I think you had better stay. I think Mr. Headstone had better not say what he thinks of saying."

"Why, how do you know what it is?" returned the boy.

"Perhaps I don't, but—"

"Perhaps you don't? No, Liz, I should think not. If you knew what it was, you would give me a very different answer. There; let go; be sensible. I wonder you don't remember that Mr. Headstone is looking on."

She allowed him to separate himself from her, and he, after saying, "Now, Liz, be a rational girl and a good sister," walked away. She remained standing alone with Bradley Headstone, and it was not until she raised her eyes, that he spoke.

"I said," he began, "when I saw you last, that there was something unexplained, which might perhaps influence you. I have come this evening to explain it. I hope you will not judge of me by my hesitating manner when I speak to you. You see me at my greatest disadvantage. It is most unfortunate for me that I wish you to see me at my best, and that I know you see me at my worst."

She moved slowly on when he paused, and he moved slowly on beside her.

"It seems egotistical to begin by saying so much about myself," he resumed, "but whatever I say to you seems, even in my own ears, below what I want to say, and different from what I want to say. I can't help it. So it is. You are the ruin of me."

She started at the passionate sound of the last words, and

at the passionate action of his hands, with which they were accompanied.

"Yes! you are the ruin—the ruin—the ruin—of me. I have no resource in myself, I have no confidence in myself, I have no government of myself when you are near me or in my thoughts. And you are always in my thoughts now. I have never been quit of you since I first saw you. Oh, that was a wretched day for me! That was a wretched, miserable day!"

A touch of pity for him mingled with her dislike of him, and she said: "Mr. Headstone, I am grieved to have done you any harm, but I have never meant it."

"There!" he cried, despairingly. "Now, I seem to have reproached you, instead of revealing to you the state of my own mind! Bear with me. I am always wrong when you are in question. It is my doom."

Struggling with himself, and by times looking up at the deserted windows of the houses as if there could be anything written in their grimy panes that would help him, he paced the whole pavement at her side, before he spoke again.

"I must try to give expression to what is in my mind; it shall and must be spoken. Though you see me so confounded—though you strike me so helpless—I ask you to believe that there are many people who think well of me; that there are some people who highly esteem me; that I have in my way won a station which is considered worth winning."

"Surely, Mr. Headstone, I do believe it. Surely I have always known it from Charley."

"I ask you to believe that if I were to offer my home such as it is, my station such as it is, my affections such as they are, to any one of the best considered, and best qualified, and most distinguished, among the young women engaged in my calling, they would probably be accepted. Even readily accepted."

"I do not doubt it," said Lizzie, with her eyes upon the ground.

"I have sometimes had it in my thoughts to make that offer and to settle down as many men of my class do: I on the one side of a school, my wife on the other, both of us interested in the same work."

"Why have you not done so?" asked Lizzie Hexam.
"Why do you not do so?"

"Far better that I never did! The only one grain of comfort I have had these many weeks," he said, always speaking passionately, and, when most emphatic, repeating that former action of his hands, which was like flinging his heart's blood down before her in drops upon the pavement-stones, "the only one grain of comfort I have had these many weeks is, that I never did. For if I had, and if the same spell had come upon me for my ruin, I know I should have broken that tie asunder as if it had been thread."

She glanced at him with a glance of fear, and a shrinking gesture. He answered, as if she had spoken.

"No! It would not have been voluntary on my part, any more than it is voluntary in me to be here now. You draw me to you. If I were shut up in a strong prison, you would draw me out. I should break through the wall to come to you. If I were lying on a sick bed, you would draw me up—to stagger to your feet and fall there."

The wild energy of the man, now quite let loose, was absolutely terrible. He stopped and laid his hand upon a piece of the coping of the burial-ground enclosure, as if he would have dislodged the stone.

"No man knows till the time comes, what depths are within him. To some men it never comes; let them rest and be thankful! To me, you brought it; on me, you forced it; and the bottom of this raging sea," striking himself upon the breast, "has been heaved up ever since."

"Mr. Headstone, I have heard enough. Let me stop you here. It will be better for you and better for me. Let us find my brother."

"Not yet. It shall and must be spoken. I have been in torments ever since I stopped short of it before. You are alarmed. It is another of my miseries that I cannot speak to you or speak of you without stumbling at every syllable, unless I let the check go altogether and run mad. Here is a man lighting the lamps. He will be gone directly. I entreat of you let us walk round this place again. You have no reason to look alarmed; I can restrain myself, and I will."

She yielded to the entreaty—how could she do other-

wise?—and they paced the stones in silence. One by one the lights leaped up, making the cold gray church tower more remote, and they were alone again. He said no more until they had regained the spot where he had broken off; there, he again stood still, and again grasped the stone. In saying what he said then, he never looked at her; but looked at it and wrenched at it.

“You know what I am going to say. I love you. What other men may mean when they use that expression, I cannot tell; what *I* mean is, that I am under the influence of some tremendous attraction which I have resisted in vain, and which overmasters me. You could draw me to fire, you could draw me to water, you could draw me to the gallows, you could draw me to any death, you could draw me to anything I have most avoided, you could draw me to any exposure and disgrace. This and the confusion of my thoughts, so that I am fit for nothing, is what I mean by your being the ruin of me. But if you would return a favorable answer to my offer of myself in marriage, you could draw me to any good—every good—with equal force. My circumstances are quite easy, and you would want for nothing. My reputation stands quite high, and would be a shield for yours. If you saw me at my work, able to do it well and respected in it, you might even come to take a sort of pride in me;—I would try hard that you should. Whatever considerations I may have thought of against this offer, I have conquered, and I make it with all my heart. Your brother favors me to the utmost, and it is likely that we might live and work together; anyhow, it is certain that he would have my best influence and support. I don't know that I could say more if I tried. I might only weaken what is ill enough said as it is. I only add that if it is any claim on you to be in earnest, I am in thorough earnest, dreadful earnest.”

The powdered mortar from under the stone at which he wrenched, rattled on the pavement to confirm his words.

“Mr. Headstone—”

“Stop! I implore you, before you answer me, to walk round this place once more. It will give you a minute's time to think, and me a minute's time to get some fortitude together.”

Again she yielded to the entreaty, and again they came back to the same place, and again he worked at the stone.

"Is it," he said, with his attention apparently engrossed by it, "yes, or no?"

"Mr. Headstone, I thank you sincerely, I thank you gratefully, and hope you may find a worthy wife before long and be very happy. But it is no."

"Is no short time necessary for reflection; no weeks or days?" he asked, in the same half-suffocated way.

"None whatever."

"Are you quite decided, and is there no chance of any change in my favor?"

"I am quite decided, Mr. Headstone, and I am bound to answer I am certain there is none."

"Then," said he, suddenly changing his tone and turning to her, and bringing his clenched hand down upon the stone with a force that laid the knuckles raw and bleeding; "then I hope that I may never kill him!"

The dark look of hatred and revenge with which the words broke from his livid lips, and with which he stood holding out his smeared hand as if it held some weapon and had just struck a mortal blow, made her so afraid of him that she turned to run away. But he caught her by the arm.

"Mr. Headstone, let me go. Mr. Headstone, I must call for help!"

"It is I who should call for help," he said; "you don't know yet how much I need it."

The working of his face as she shrank from it, glancing round for her brother and uncertain what to do, might have extorted a cry from her in another instant; but all at once he sternly stopped it, and fixed it, as if Death itself had done so.

"There! You see I have recovered myself. Hear me out."

With much of the dignity of courage, as she recalled her self-reliant life and her right to be free from accountability to this man, she released her arm from his grasp and stood looking full at him. She had never been so handsome in his eyes. A shade came over them while he looked back at her, as if she drew the very light out of them to herself.

"This time, at least, I will leave nothing unsaid," he went

on, folding his hands before him, clearly to prevent his being betrayed into any impetuous gesture; "this last time at least, I will not be tortured with after-thoughts of a lost opportunity. Mr. Eugene Wrayburn."

"Was it of him you spoke in your ungovernable rage and violence?" Lizzie Hexam demanded with spirit.

He bit his lip, and looked at her, and said never a word.

"Was it Mr. Wrayburn that you threatened?"

He bit his lip again, and looked at her, and said never a word.

"You asked me to hear you out, and you will not speak. Let me find my brother."

"Stay! I threatened no one."

Her look dropped for an instant to his bleeding hand. He lifted it to his mouth, wiped it on his sleeve, and again folded it over the other. "Mr. Eugene Wrayburn," he repeated.

"Why do you mention that name again and again, Mr. Headstone?"

"Because it is the text of the little I have left to say. Observe! There are no threats in it. If I utter a threat, stop me, and fasten it upon me. Mr. Eugene Wrayburn."

A worse threat than was conveyed in his manner of uttering the name, could hardly have escaped him.

"He haunts you. You accept favors from him. You are willing enough to listen to *him*. I know it, as well as he does."

"Mr. Wrayburn has been considerate and good to me sir," said Lizzie, proudly, "in connection with the death and with the memory of my poor father."

"No doubt. He is of course a very considerate and a very good man, Mr. Eugene Wrayburn."

"He is nothing to you, I think," said Lizzie, with an indignation she could not repress.

"Oh yes, he is. There you mistake. He is much to me."

"What can he be to you?"

"He can be a rival to me, among other things."

"Mr. Headstone, it is cowardly in you to speak to me in this way. But it makes me able to tell you that I do not like you, and that I never have liked you from the first, and that no other living creature has anything to do with the effect you have produced upon me for yourself."

His head bent for a moment, as if under a weight, and he then looked up again, moistening his lips. "I was going on with the little I had left to say. I knew all this about Mr. Eugene Wrayburn, all the while you were drawing me to you. I strove against the knowledge, but quite in vain. It made no difference in me. With Mr. Eugene Wrayburn in my mind, I went on. With Mr. Eugene Wrayburn in my mind, I spoke to you just now. With Mr. Eugene Wrayburn in my mind, I have been set aside and cast out."

"If you give those names to my thanking you for your proposal and declining it, is it my fault, Mr. Headstone?" said Lizzie, compassionating the struggle he could not conceal, almost as much as she was repelled and alarmed by it.

"I am not complaining," he returned, "I am only stating the case. I had to wrestle with my self-respect when I submitted to be drawn to you in spite of Mr. Wrayburn. You may imagine how low my self-respect lies now."

She was hurt and angry; but repressed herself in consideration of his suffering, and of his being her brother's friend.

"And it lies under his feet," said Bradley, unfolding his hands in spite of himself, and fiercely motioning with them both towards the stones of the pavement. "Remember that! It lies under that fellow's feet, and he treads upon it and exults above it."

"He does not!" said Lizzie.

"He does!" said Bradley. "I have stood before him face to face, and he crushed me down in the dirt of his contempt, and walked over me. Why? Because he knew with triumph what was in store for me to-night."

"O, Mr. Headstone, you talk quite wildly."

"Quite collectedly. I know what I say too well. Now I have said all. I have used no threat, remember; I have done no more than show you how the case stands;—how the case stands, so far."

At this moment her brother sauntered into view close by. She darted to him, and caught him by the hand. Bradley followed, and laid his heavy hand on the boy's opposite shoulder.

"Charley Hexam, I am going home. I must walk home by myself to-night, and get shut up in my room without be

ing spoken to. Give me half an hour's start, and let me be till you find me at my work in the morning. I shall be at my work in the morning just as usual."

Clasping his hands, he uttered a short unearthly broken cry, and went his way. The brother and sister were left looking at one another near a lamp in the solitary churchyard, and the boy's face clouded and darkened, as he said in a rough tone: "What is the meaning of this? What have you done to my best friend? Out with the truth!"

"Charley! Speak a little more considerately!"

"I am not in the humor for consideration, or for nonsense of any sort," replied the boy. "What have you been doing? Why has Mr. Headstone gone from us in that way?"

"He asked me—you know he asked me—to be his wife, Charley."

"Well?" said the boy, impatiently.

"And I was obliged to tell him that I could not."

"You were obliged to tell him," repeated the boy, angrily, between his teeth, and rudely pushing her away. "You were obliged to tell him? Do you know that he is worth fifty of you?"

"It may easily be so, Charley, but I cannot marry him."

"You mean that you are conscious that you can't appreciate him, and don't deserve him, I suppose?"

"I mean that I do not like him, Charley, and that I will never marry him."

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed the boy, "you are a nice picture of a sister! Upon my soul, you are a pretty piece of disinterestedness! And so all my endeavors to cancel the past and to raise myself in the world, and to raise you with me, are to be beaten down by *your* low whims; are they?"

"I will not reproach you, Charley."

"Hear her!" exclaimed the boy, looking round at the darkness. "She won't reproach me! She does her best to destroy my fortunes and her own, and she won't reproach me! Why, you'll tell me, next, that you won't reproach Mr. Headstone for coming out of the sphere to which he is an ornament, and putting himself at *your* feet, to be rejected by *you*!"

"No, Charley; I will only tell you, as I told himself, that I

thank him for doing so, that I am sorry he did so, and that I hope he will do much better, and be happy."

Some touch of compunction smote the boy's hardening heart as he looked upon her, his patient little nurse in infancy, his patient friend, adviser, and reclamer in boyhood, the self-forgetting sister who had done everything for him. His tone relented, and he drew her arm through his.

"Now, come, Liz; don't let us quarrel: let us be reasonable and talk this over like brother and sister. It's soon set right. All that need be done is for you to tell me at once that I may go home and tell Mr. Headstone that what has taken place is not final, and that it will all come right by-and-by."

The pale face looked anxiously and lovingly at him, but she shook her head.

"Can't you speak?" said the boy, sharply.

"I am very unwilling to speak, Charley. If I must, I must. I cannot allow you to say any such thing to Mr. Headstone. Nothing remains to be said to him from me, after what I have said for good and all, to-night."

"And this girl," cried the boy, contemptuously throwing her off again, "calls herself a sister!"

"Charley, dear, that is the second time that you have almost struck me. Don't be hurt by my words. I don't mean—Heaven forbid!—that you intended it; but you hardly know with what a sudden swing you removed yourself from me."

"However!" said the boy, taking no heed of the remonstrance, and pursuing his own mortified disappointment, "I know what this means, and you shall not disgrace me."

"It means what I have told you, Charley, and nothing more."

"That's not true," said the boy in a violent tone, "and you know it's not. It means your precious Mr. Wrayburn; that's what it means. You are an inveterately bad girl, and a false sister, and I have done with you. For ever, I have done with you!"

He threw up his ungrateful and ungracious hand as if it set up a barrier between them, and flung himself upon his heel and left her. She remained impassive on the same

spot, silent and motionless, until the striking of the church clock roused her, and she turned away. But then, with the breaking up of her immobility came the breaking up of the waters that the cold heart of the selfish boy had frozen. And "O that I were lying here with the dead!" and "O Charley, Charley!" were all the words she said, as she laid her face in her hands on the stone coping.

A figure passed by, and passed on. After hesitating a little, the figure turned back, and, advancing with an air of gentleness and compassion, said: "Pardon me, young woman, for speaking to you, but you are under some distress of mind. Can I help you?"

She raised her head at the sound of these kind words, and answered gladly, "O, Mr. Riah, is it you?"

"My daughter," said the old man, "I stand amazed! I spoke as to a stranger. Take my arm, take my arm. What grieves you? Who has done this? Poor girl, poor girl!"

"My brother has quarreled with me," sobbed Lizzie, "and renounced me."

"He is a thankless dog," said the Jew, angrily. "Let him go. Shake the dust from thy feet and let him go. Come, daughter! Come home with me—it is but across the road—and take a little time to recover your peace and to make your eyes seemly, and then I will bear you company through the streets."

She accepted the support he offered her, and they slowly passed out of the church-yard. They were in the act of emerging into the main thoroughfare, when another figure loitering discontentedly by, started and exclaimed, "Lizzie! why, where have you been? What is the matter?"

"Mr. Wrayburn, I cannot tell you now. I cannot tell you to-night, if I ever can tell you. Pray leave me."

"But, Lizzie, I came expressly to join you. And I have been lingering about," added Eugene, "like a bailiff; or," with a look at Riah, "an old clothesman."

"Mr. Wrayburn, pray, pray leave me with this protector. And one thing more, pray, pray be careful of yourself."

"If Mr. Aaron," said Eugene, "will be good enough to relinquish his charge to me, he will be quite free for any engagement he may have at the Synagogue. Mr. Aaron, will you have the kindness?"

"Christian gentleman," replied the old man, calmly, "I will hear only one voice to-night, desiring me to leave this damsel before I have conveyed her to her home. If she requests it, I will do it."

"I do not ask you," said Lizzie, "and I beg you take me home. Mr. Wrayburn, I have had a bitter trial to-night, and I hope you will not think me ungrateful, or mysterious, or changeable. I am neither; I am wretched. Pray remember what I said to you. Pray, pray, take care."

"My dear Lizzie," he returned, in a low voice, bending over her on the other side, "of what? Of whom?"

"Of any one you have lately seen and made angry."

He snapped his fingers and laughed. "Come," said he, "since no better may be, Mr. Aaron and I will divide this trust, and see you home together. Mr. Aaron on that side: I on this. If perfectly agreeable to Mr. Aaron, the escort will now proceed."

He knew his power over her, and going on at her side, so gayly, regardless of all that had been urged against him; so superior in his sallies and self-possession to the gloomy constraint of her suitor and the selfish petulance of her brother; so faithful to her, as it seemed, when her own stock was faithless; what an immense advantage, what an overpowering influence, were his that night!

They went direct to Lizzie's lodging. A little short of the house-door she parted from them, and went in alone.

CHAPTER XXX.

IT is the first anniversary of the happy marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Lammle, and the celebration is a breakfast.

Often more than twice or thrice while breakfast is in progress, Mr. Twemlow gives a little sudden turn towards Mrs. Lammle, and then says to her, "I beg your pardon!" This not being Twemlow's usual way, why is it his way to-day? Why, the truth is, Twemlow repeatedly labors under the impression that Mrs. Lammle is going to speak to him, and turning finds that it is not so.

Lady Tippins, partaking plentifully of the fruits of the earth (including grape-juice in the category), becomes live-

lier, and applies herself to elicit sparks from Mortimer Lightwood. It is always understood among the initiated, that that faithless lover must be planted at table opposite to Lady Tippins, who will then strike conversational fire out of him. In a pause of mastication and deglutition, Lady Tippins, contemplating Mortimer, recalls that it was at our dear Veneerings, and in the presence of a party who are surely all here, that he told them his story of the man from somewhere, which afterwards became so horribly interesting and vulgarly popular.

"Yes, Lady Tippins," dissents Mortimer; "as they say on the stage, Even so!"

"Then we expect you," retorts the charmer, "to sustain your reputation, and tell us something else."

"Lady Tippins, I exhausted myself for life that day. I assure you, I have nothing to tell." But Eugene adding in a low voice, "There, tell it, tell it!" he corrects himself with the addition, "Nothing worth mentioning."

Boots and Brewer immediately perceive that it is immensely worth mentioning, and become politely clamorous. Veneering is also visited by a perception to the same effect.

"Pray don't be at the trouble of composing yourselves to listen," says Mortimer Lightwood, "because I shall have finished long before you have fallen into comfortable attitudes. The reference which I suppose to be made by my honorable and fair enslaver opposite, is to the following circumstance. Very lately, the young woman, Lizzie Hexam, daughter of the late Jesse Hexam, otherwise Gaffer, who will be remembered to have found the body of the man from somewhere, mysteriously received, she knew not from whom, an explicit retractation of the charges made against her father by another water-side character of the name of Riderhood. Nobody believed them, because Rogue Riderhood had previously played fast and loose with the said charges, and, in fact, abandoned them. However, the retractation I have mentioned found its way into Lizzie Hexam's hands, with a general flavor on it of having been favored by some anonymous messenger in a dark cloak and slouched hat, and was by her forwarded, in her father's vindication, to Mr. Boffin, my client, who hereupon desires his Secretary—

an individual of the hermit-crab or oyster species, and whose name, I think, is Chokesmith—but it doesn't in the least matter—say Artichoke—to put himself in communication with Lizzie Hexam. Artichoke professes his readiness so to do, endeavors to do so, but fails."

"Why fails?" asks Boots.

"How fails?" asks Brewer.

"Pardon me," returns Lightwood, "I must postpone the reply for one moment, or we shall have an anti-climax. Artichoke failing signally, my client refers the task to me: his purpose being to advance the interests of the object of his search. I proceed to put myself in communication with her; I even happen to possess some special means," with a glance at Eugene, "of putting myself in communication with her; but I fail too, because she has vanished."

"Vanished!" is the general echo.

"Disappeared," says Mortimer. "Nobody knows how, nobody knows when, nobody knows where. And so ends the story to which my honorable and fair enslaver opposite referred."

Twemlow once more turns involuntarily to Mrs. Lammle, not cured yet of that often recurring impression that she is going to speak to him. This time she really is going to speak to him. Veneering is talking with his other next neighbor, and she speaks in a low voice."

"Mr. Twemlow."

He answers, "I beg your pardon? Yes?" Still a little doubtful, because of her not looking at him.

"You have the soul of a gentleman, and I know I may trust you. Will you give me the opportunity of saying a few words to you when you come up-stairs?"

"Assuredly. I shall be honored."

"Don't seem to do so, if you please, and don't think it inconsistent if my manner should be more careless than my words. I may be watched."

In the drawing-room, groups form as usual. Mrs. Lammle, on a sofa by a table, invites Mr. Twemlow's attention to a book of portraits in her hand.

Mr. Twemlow takes his station on a settee before her, and Mrs. Lammle shows him a portrait.

"You have reason to be surprised," she says, softly, "but I wish you wouldn't look so. I think, you never saw that distant connection of yours before to-day?"

"No, never."

"Now that you do see him, you see what he is. You are not proud of him?"

"To say the truth, Mrs. Lammle, no."

"If you knew more of him, you would be less inclined to acknowledge him. Here is another portrait. What do you think of it?"

Twemlow has just presence of mind enough to say aloud: "Very like! Uncommonly like!"

"So like as to be almost a caricature?—Mr. Twemlow, it is impossible to tell you what the struggle in my mind has been, before I could bring myself to speak to you as I do now. It is only in the conviction that I may trust you never to betray me, that I can proceed. Sincerely promise me that you never will betray my confidence—that you will respect it, even though you may no longer respect me,—and I shall be as satisfied as if you had sworn it."

"Madam, on the honor of a poor gentleman—"

"Thank you. I can desire no more. Mr. Twemlow, I implore you to save Georgiana. She will be sacrificed. She will be inveigled and married to that connection of yours. It is a partnership affair, a money-speculation. She has no strength of will or character to help herself, and she is on the brink of being sold into wretchedness for life."

"Amazing! But what can *I* do to prevent it?" demands Twemlow, shocked and bewildered to the last degree.

"Here is another portrait. And not good, is it?"

Aghast at the light manner of her throwing her head back to look at it critically, Twemlow still dimly perceives the expediency of throwing his own head back, and does so. Though he no more sees the portrait than if it were in China.

"Decidedly not good," said Mrs. Lammle. "Stiff and exaggerated!"

"And ex—" But Twemlow, in his demolished state, cannot command the word, and trails off into "—actly so."

"Mr. Twemlow, your word will have weight with her pompous, self-blinded father. You know how much he makes of your family. Lose no time. Warn him."

"But warn him against whom?"

"Against me."

By great good fortune Twemlow receives a stimulant at this critical instant. The stimulant is Lammle's voice.

"Sophronia, my dear, what portraits are you showing Twemlow?"

"Public characters, Alfred."

"Show him the last of me."

"Yes, Alfred."

She puts the book down, takes another book up, turns the leaves, and presents the portrait to Twemlow.

"That is the last of Mr. Lammle. Do you think it good?—Warn her father against me. I deserve it, for I have been in the scheme from the first. It is my husband's scheme, your connection's, and mine. I tell you this, only to show you the necessity of the poor little foolish affectionate creature's being befriended and rescued. You will not repeat this to her father. You will spare me so far, and spare my husband. For, though this celebration of to-day is all a mockery, he is my husband, and we must live.—Do you think it like?"

"Very well indeed!" are at length the words which Twemlow with great difficulty extracts from himself.

"I am glad you think so. On the whole, I myself consider it the best. The others are so dark. Now here, for instance, is another of Mr. Lammle—Tell him I am a match-maker; tell him I am an artful and designing woman; tell him you are sure his daughter is best out of my house and my company. Tell him any such things of me; they will all be true.—Alfred, Mr. Twemlow thinks the last one the best, and quite agrees with you and me."

Alfred advances. The groups break up. Then good-bye and good-bye.

CHAPTER XXXI

MR. AND MRS. WILFER had seen a full quarter of a hundred more anniversaries of their wedding day than Mr. and Mrs. Lammle had seen of theirs, but they still celebrated the occasion in the bosom of their family. Not that

these celebrations ever resulted in anything particularly agreeable, or that the family was ever disappointed by that circumstance on account of having looked forward to the return of the auspicious day with sanguine anticipations of enjoyment. It was kept morally, rather as a Fast than a Feast, enabling Mrs. Wilfer to hold a sombre darkling state which exhibited that impressive woman in her choicest colors.

The revolving year having brought the day once more, Bella had arrived with tokens from Mrs. Boffin which had materially assisted in beguiling the rosy hours until it was time for her to have Pa's escort back. The dimples duly tied up in the bonnet-strings and the leave-taking done, they got out into the air, and the cherub drew a long breath as if he found it refreshing.

"Well, dear Pa," said Bella, "the anniversary may be considered over."

"Yes, my dear, there's another of 'em gone."

Bella drew his arm closer through hers as they walked along, and gave it a number of consolatory pats. "Thank you, my dear," he said, as if she had spoken; "I am all right, my dear. Well, and how do you get on, Bella?"

"I am not at all improved, Pa."

"Ain't you really, though?"

"No, Pa. On the contrary, I am worse."

"Lor!" said the cherub.

"I am worse, Pa. I make so many calculations, how much a year I must have when I marry, and what is the least I can manage to do with, that I am beginning to get wrinkles over my nose. Did you notice any wrinkles over my nose this evening, Pa?"

Pa laughing at this, Bella gave him two or three shakes. She then laid the little forefinger of her right glove on her lip, and then laid it on her father's lip—"that's a kiss for you. And now I am going seriously to tell you—let me see how many—four secrets. Mind! Serious, grave, weighty secrets. Strictly between ourselves."

"Number one, my dear?"

"Number one," said Bella, "will electrify you, Pa. Who do think has"—she was confused here in spite of her merry way of beginning—"has made an offer to me?"

Pa looked in her face, and looked at the ground, and looked in her face again, and declared he could never guess.

"Mr. Rokesmith."

"You don't tell me so, my dear!"

"Mis—ter Roke—smith, Pa," said Bella, separating the syllables for emphasis. "What do you say to *that*?"

Pa answered quietly with the counter-question, "What did *you* say to that, my love?"

"I said No," returned Bella, sharply. "Of course."

"Yes. Of course," said her father, meditating. "Number two, my dear?"

"Number two, Pa, is much to the same purpose, though not so preposterous. Mr. Lightwood would propose to me, if I would let him."

"Then I understand, my dear, that you don't intend to let him?"

Bella again saying, "Why, of course not!" her father felt himself bound to echo, "Of course not."

"I don't care for him," said Bella.

"That's enough," her father interposed.

"No, Pa, it's *not* enough," rejoined Bella, giving him another shake or two. "Haven't I told you what a mercenary little wretch I am? It only becomes enough when he has no money, and no clients, and no expectations, and no anything but debts."

"Hah!" said the cherub, a little depressed. "Number three, my dear?"

"Number three, Pa, is a better thing. A generous thing, a noble thing, a delightful thing. Mrs. Boffin has herself told me, as a secret, with her own kind lips—and truer lips never opened or closed in this life, I am sure—that they wish to see me well married; and that when I marry with their consent they will portion me most handsomely." Here the grateful girl burst out crying very heartily.

"Don't cry, my darling," said her father, with his hand to his eyes; "it's excusable in me to be a little overcome when I find that my dear favorite child is, after all disappointments, to be so provided for and so raised in the world; but don't *you* cry, don't *you* cry. I am very thankful. I congratulate you with all my heart, my dear. Number four, my dear?"

Bella's countenance fell in the midst of her mirth. "After all, perhaps I had better put off number four, Pa. Let me try once more, if for never so short a time, to hope that it may not really be so."

The change in her strengthened the cherub's interest in number four, and he said quietly: "May not be so, my dear? May not be how, my dear?"

Bella looked at him pensively, and shook her head.

"Oh, Pa, there is no good in number four! I am so sorry for it, I am so unwilling to believe it, I have tried so earnestly not to see it, that it is very hard to tell, even to you. But Mr. Boffin is being spoiled by prosperity, and is changing every day."

"My dear Bella, I hope and trust not."

"I have hoped and trusted not too, Pa; but every day he changes for the worse, and for the worse. Not to me—he is always much the same to me—but to others about him. Before my eyes he grows suspicious, capricious, hard, tyrannical, unjust. If ever a good man were ruined by good fortune, it is my benefactor. And yet, Pa, think how terrible the fascination of money is! I see this, and hate this, and dread this, and don't know but that money might make a much worse change in me. And yet I have money always in my thoughts and my desires; and the whole life I place before myself is money, money, money, and what money can make of life!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

WERE Bella Wilfer's bright and ready little wits at fault, or was the Golden Dustman passing through the furnace of proof and coming out dross?

On that very night of her return from the Happy Return, something chanced which Bella closely followed with her eyes and ears. There was an apartment at the side of the Boffin mansion, known as Mr. Boffin's room. Far less grand than the rest of the house, it was far more comfortable.

Mr. and Mrs. Boffin were reported sitting in this room, when Bella got back. Entering it, she found the Secretary there too; in official attendance it would appear, for he was

standing with some papers in his hand by a table with shaded candles on it, at which Mr. Boffin was seated thrown back in his easy chair.

"You are busy, sir," said Bella, hesitating at the door.

"Not at all, my dear, not at all. You're one of ourselves. Come in, come in. Here's the old lady in her usual place."

Mrs. Boffin adding her nod and smile of welcome to Mr. Boffin's words, Bella took her book to a chair in the fireside corner, by Mrs. Boffin's work-table. Mr. Boffin's station was on the opposite side.

"Now, Rokesmith," said the Golden Dustman, so sharply rapping the table to bespeak his attention as Bella turned the leaves of her book, that she started; "where were we?"

"You were saying, sir," returned the Secretary, with an air of some reluctance and a glance towards those others who were present, "that you considered the time had come for fixing my salary."

"Don't be above calling it wages, man," said Mr. Boffin, testily. "What the deuce! I never talked of *my* salary when I was in service."

"My wages," said the Secretary, correcting himself.

"Now, concerning these same wages," said Mr. Boffin. "Sit down. Now, I've gone into the matter, and I say two hundred a year. What do you think of it? Do you think it's enough?"

"Thank you. It is a fair proposal."

"I don't say, you know," Mr. Boffin stipulated, "but what it may be more than enough. And I'll tell you why, Rokesmith. A man of property, like me, is bound to consider the market price. At first I didn't enter into that as much as I might have done; but I've got acquainted with other men of property since, and I've got acquainted with the duties of property. A sheep is worth so much in the market, and I ought to give it and no more. A secretary is worth so much in the market, and I ought to give it and no more. But I don't mind stretching a point with you."

"Mr. Boffin, you are very good," replied the Secretary.

"Then we put the figure," said Mr. Boffin, "at two hundred a year. Then the figure's disposed of. Now, there must be no misunderstanding regarding what I buy for two

hundred a year. If I pay for a sheep, I buy it out and out. Similarly, if I pay for a secretary, I buy *him* out and out."

"In other words, you purchase my whole time?"

"Certainly I do. Look here," said Mr. Boffin, "it ain't that I want to occupy your whole time; you can take up a book for a minute or two when you've nothing better to do, though I think you'll a'most always find something useful to do. But I want to keep you in attendance. Therefore, betwixt your breakfast and your supper, on the premises I expect to find you. If you want leave, ask for it."

Again the Secretary bowed. His manner was uneasy and astonished, and showed a sense of humiliation.

"I'll have a bell," said Mr. Boffin, "hung from this room to yours, and when I want you, I'll touch it. I don't call to mind that I have anything more to say at present."

The Secretary rose, gathered up his papers, and withdrew. Bella's eyes followed him to the door, lighted on Mr. Boffin complacently thrown back in his easy chair, and drooped over her book.

"I have let that chap, that young man of mine," said Mr. Boffin, taking a trot up and down the room, "get above his work. It won't do. I must have him down a peg. A man of property owes a duty to other men of property, and must look sharp after his inferiors."

Bella felt that Mrs. Boffin was not comfortable, and that the eyes of that good creature sought to discover from her face what attention she had given to this discourse, and what impression it had made upon her. For which reason Bella's eyes drooped more engrossedly over her book, and she turned the page with an air of profound absorption in it.

"Noddy," said Mrs. Boffin, after thoughtfully pausing in her work.

"My dear," returned the Golden Dustman, stopping short in his trot.

"Excuse my putting it to you, Noddy, but now really! Haven't you been a little strict with Mr. Rokesmith to-night? Haven't you been a little—just a little little—not quite like your old self?"

"Why, old woman, I hope so," returned Mr. Boffin, cheerfully, if not boastfully.

"Hope so, deary?"

"Our old selves wouldn't do here, old lady. Haven't you found that out yet? Our old selves would be fit for nothing here but to be robbed and imposed upon. Our old selves weren't people of fortune; our new selves are; it's a great difference."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Boffin, pausing in her work again, softly to draw a long breath and to look at the fire. "A great difference."

"As to Rokesmith, that young man of mine," said Mr. Boffin, "it's the same with him as with the footmen. I have found out that you must either scrunch them, or let them scrunch you. If you ain't imperious with 'em, they won't believe in your being any better than themselves, if as good, after the stories (lies mostly) that they have heard of your beginnings. There's nothing betwixt stiffening yourself up, and throwing yourself away; take my word for that, old lady."

Bella ventured for a moment to look stealthily towards him under her eyelashes, and she saw a dark cloud of suspicion, covetousness, and conceit, overshadowing the once open face.

"Hows'ever," said he, "this isn't entertaining to Miss Bella. Is it Bella?"

A deceiving Bella she was, to look at him with that pensively abstracted air, as if her mind were full of her book and she had not heard a single word!

"Hah! Better employed than to attend to it," said Mr. Boffin. "That's right, that's right. Especially as you have no call to be told how to value yourself, my dear."

Coloring a little under this compliment, Bella returned, "I hope, sir, you don't think me vain?"

"Not a bit, my dear," said Mr. Boffin. "But I think it's very creditable in you, at your age, to be so well up with the pace of the world, and to know what to go in for. You are right. Go in for money, my love. Money's the article. You'll make money of your good looks, and of the money Mrs. Boffin and me will have the pleasure of settling upon you, and you'll live and die rich. That's the state to live and die in!" said Mr. Boffin, in an unctuous manner. "R—r—rich!"

Somehow, Bella was not so well pleased with this assurance and this prospect as she might have been. Somehow, when she put her arms round Mrs. Boffin's neck and said Good-Night, she derived a sense of unworthiness from the still anxious face of that good woman and her obvious wish to excuse her husband.

Mr. Boffin's interest began to centre in book-shops; and more than that—for that of itself would not have been much—in one exceptional kind of book.

"Look in here, my dear," Mr. Boffin would say, checking Bella's arm at a bookseller's window; "you can read at sight, and your eyes are as sharp as they're bright. Now, look well about you, my dear, and tell me if you see any book about a Miser."

If Bella saw such a book, Mr. Boffin would instantly dart in and buy it. And still, as if they had not found it, they would seek out another book-shop, and Mr. Boffin would say, "Now, look well all round, my dear, for a Life of a Miser, or any book of that sort; any Lives of odd characters who may have been Misers."

Bella would examine the window with the greatest attention, while Mr. Boffin would examine her face. The moment she pointed out any book as being entitled Lives of eccentric personages, Anecdotes of strange characters, Records of remarkable individuals, or anything to that purpose, Mr. Boffin's countenance would light up, and he would instantly dart in and buy it. Size, price, quality, were of no account. Any book that seemed to promise a chance of miserly biography, Mr. Boffin purchased without a moment's delay and carried home. Happening to be informed by a bookseller that a portion of the Annual Register was devoted to "Characters," Mr. Boffin at once bought a whole set of that ingenious compilation, and began to carry it home piecemeal, confiding a volume to Bella, and bearing three himself. The completion of this labor occupied them about a fortnight. When the task was done, Mr. Boffin, with his appetite for Misers whetted instead of satiated, began to look out again.

While these occurrences were in progress, Mrs. Lammle made the discovery that Bella had a fascinating influence

over her. The Lammles, originally presented by the dear Veneerings, visited the Boffins on all grand occasions, and Mrs. Lammle took the friendliest interest in Bella's making a good match.

"I fear, Bella dear," said Mrs. Lammle one day, "that you will be very hard to please."

"I don't expect to be pleased, dear," said Bella, with a languid turn of her eyes.

"Truly, my love," returned Sophronia, shaking her head, and smiling her best smile, "it would not be very easy to find a man worthy of your attractions."

"The question is not a man, my dear," said Bella, coolly, "but an establishment."

"My love," returned Mrs. Lammle, "your prudence amazes me—where *did* you study life so well!—you are right. In such a case as yours, the object is a fitting establishment. You could not descend to an inadequate one from Mrs. Boffin's house, and even if your beauty alone could not command it, it is to be assumed that Mr. and Mrs. Boffin will—"

"Oh! they have already," Bella interposed.

"No! Have they really?"

A little vexed by a suspicion that she had spoken precipitately, and withal a little defiant of her own vexation, Bella determined not to retreat.

"That is to say," she explained, "they have told me they mean to portion me as their adopted child, if you mean that. But don't mention it."

"Mention it!" replied Mrs. Lammle, as if she were full of awakened feeling at the suggestion of such an impossibility. "Men-tion it!"

On one point connected with the watch she kept on Mr. Boffin, Bella felt very inquisitive, and that was the question whether the Secretary watched him too, and followed the sure and steady change in him, as she did. Her very limited intercourse with Mr. Rokesmith rendered this hard to find out. Their communication now, at no time extended beyond the preservation of commonplace appearances before Mr. and Mrs. Boffin; and if Bella and the Secretary

were ever left alone together by any chance, he immediately withdrew. She consulted his face when she could do so covertly, as she worked or read, and could make nothing of it. He looked subdued; but he had acquired a strong command of feature, and whenever Mr. Boffin spoke to him in Bella's presence, or whatever revelation of himself Mr. Boffin made, the Secretary's face changed no more than a wall.

The worst of the matter was, that it thus fell out insensibly—and most provokingly, as Bella complained to herself, in her impetuous little manner—that her observation of Mr. Boffin involved a continual observation of Mr. Rokesmith. “Won't *that* extract a look from him?”—“Can it be possible *that* makes no impression on him?” Such questions Bella would propose to herself, often as many times in a day as there were hours in it.

“Can he be so base as to sell his very nature for two hundred a year?” Bella would think. And then, “But why not? It's a mere question of price with others beside him. I suppose I would sell mine, if I could get enough for it.” And so she came round again to the war with herself.

“Rokesmith,” said Mr. Boffin one evening when they were all in his room again, and he and the Secretary had been going over some accounts, “I am spending too much money. Or leastways, you are spending too much for me.”

“You are rich, sir.”

“I am not,” said Mr. Boffin.

The sharpness of the retort brought no change of expression into the Secretary's face.

“I tell you I am not rich,” repeated Mr. Boffin, “and I won't have it.”

“You are not rich, sir?” repeated the Secretary.

“Well,” returned Mr. Boffin, “if I am, that's my business. I am not going to spend at this rate, to please you, or anybody. You wouldn't like it, if it was your money.”

“Even in that impossible case, sir, I—”

“Hold your tongue!” said Mr. Boffin. “You oughtn't to like it in any case. There! I didn't mean to be rude, but you put me out so, and after all I'm master. I didn't intend to tell you to hold your tongue. I beg your pardon. Don't hold your tongue. Only, don't contradict. Have you given notice to quit your lodgings?”

"Under your direction, I have, sir."

"Then I tell you what," said Mr. Boffin; "pay the quarter's rent—pay the quarter's rent, it'll be the cheapest thing in the end—and come here at once, so that you may be always on the spot, day and night, and keep the expenses down. You'll charge the quarter's rent to me, and we must try and save it somewhere. You've got some lovely furniture; haven't you?"

"The furniture in my rooms is my own."

"Then we shan't have to buy any for you. In case you was to think it," said Mr. Boffin, with a look of peculiar shrewdness, "so honorably independent in you as to make it a relief to your mind, to make that furniture over to me in the light of a set-off against the quarter's rent, why, ease your mind, ease your mind. I don't ask it, but I won't stand in your way if you should consider it due to yourself. As to your room, choose any empty room at the top of the house."

"Any empty room will do for me," said the Secretary.

"You can take your pick," said Mr. Boffin, "and it'll be as good as eight or ten shillings a week added to your income. I won't deduct for it; I look to you to make it up handsomely by keeping the expenses down. Now I'll come to your office-room and dispose of a letter or two."

On that clear, generous face of Mrs. Boffin's, Bella had seen such traces of a pang at the heart while this dialogue was being held, that she had not the courage to turn her eyes to it when they were left alone. Feigning to be intent on her embroidery, she sat plying her needle until her busy hand was stopped by Mrs. Boffin's hand being lightly laid upon it. Yielding to the touch, she felt her hand carried to the good soul's lips, and felt a tear fall on it.

"Oh, my loved husband!" said Mrs. Boffin. "This is hard to see and hear. But my dear Bella, believe me that in spite of all the change in him, he is the best of men."

He came back at the moment when Bella had taken the hand comfortingly between her own.

"Eh?" said he, mistrustfully looking in at the door. "What's she telling you?"

"She's only praising you, sir?" said Bella.

"Praising me? You are sure? Not blaming me for

standing on my own defense against a crew of plunderers, who would suck me dry by driblets? Not blaming me for getting a little hoard together?"

He came up to them, and his wife folded her hands upon his shoulder, and shook her head, as she laid it on her hands.

"There, there, there! Don't take on, old lady."

"But I can't bear to see you so, my dear."

"Nonsense! Recollect, we are not our old selves. Recollect, we must scrunch or be scrunched. Recollect, we must hold our own. Recollect, money makes money. Don't you be uneasy, Bella, my child; don't you be doubtful. The more I save, the more you shall have."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MR. SILAS WEGG now rarely attended the minion of fortune and the worm of the hour, at his (the worm's and minion's) own house, but lay under general instructions to await him within a certain margin of hours at the Bower. Mr. Wegg took this arrangement in great dudgeon, because the appointed hours were evening hours, and those he considered precious to the progress of the friendly move. But it was quite in character, he bitterly remarked to Mr. Venus, that the upstart who had trampled on those eminent creatures, Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker, should oppress his literary man.

One evening, when he had grown accustomed to the arrival of his patron in a cab, accompanied by some profane historian charged with unutterable names of incomprehensible peoples, of impossible descent, waging wars any number of years and syllables long, and carrying illimitable hosts and riches about, with the greatest ease, beyond the confines of geography—one evening the usual time passed by, and no patron appeared. After half an hour's grace, Mr. Wegg proceeded to the outer gate, and there executed a whistle, conveying to Mr. Venus, if perchance within hearing, the tidings of his being at home and disengaged. Forth from the shelter of a neighboring wall, Mr. Venus then emerged.

"Brother in arms," said Mr. Wegg, "welcome!"

Mr Venus gave him a rather dry good-evening.

"Walk in, brother," said Silas, clapping him on the shoulder, "and take your seat in my chimbley corner; for what says the ballad?

'No malice to dread, sir,
And no falsehood to fear,
But truth to delight me, Mr. Venus,
And I forget what to cheer.
Li toddle dee om dee.
And something to guide,
My ain fireside, sir,
My ain fireside.'"

With this quotation (depending for its neatness rather on the spirit than the words), Mr. Wegg conducted his guest to his hearth.

"We'll devote the evening, brother," he exclaimed, "to prosecute our friendly move."

"Why, as to the friendly move, one of my objections to it is, that it *don't* move."

"Rome, brother," returned Wegg: "a city which (it may not be generally known) originated in twins and a wolf, and ended in Imperial marble: wasn't built in a day."

"Did I say it was?" asked Venus.

"No, you did not, brother. Well inquired."

"But I do say," proceeded Venus, "that I am taken from among my trophies of anatomy, am called upon to exchange my human warious for mere coal-ashes warious, and nothing comes of it. I think I must give up."

"No, sir!" remonstrated Wegg. "No, sir."

'Charge, Chester, charge,
On, Mr Venus, on!'

Never say die, sir! A man of your mark!"

"It's not so much saying it that I object to," returned Mr. Venus, "as doing it. And having got to do it whether or no, I can't afford to waste my time on groping for nothing in cinders. There's no encouragement to go on."

"Not them Mounds without," said Mr. Wegg, extending his right hand with an air of solemn reasoning, "encouragement? Not them Mounds now looking down upon us?"

"They're too big," grumbled Venus. "What's a scratch

here and a scrape there, a poke in this place and a dig in the other, to them? Besides; what have we found?"

"What *have* we found?" cried Wegg, delighted to be able to acquiesce. "Ah! There I grant you, comrade. Nothing. But on the contrary, comrade, what *may* we find? There you'll grant me. Anything."

"Isn't your own Mr. Boffin well acquainted with the Mounds? And wasn't he well acquainted with the deceased and his ways? And has he ever showed any expectation of finding anything?"

At that moment wheels were heard.

"Now, I should be loath," said Mr. Wegg, with an air of patient injury, "to think so ill of him as to suppose him capable of coming at this time of night. Yet it sounds like him."

A ring at the yard bell.

"It *is* him," said Mr. Wegg, "and he *is* capable of it. I am sorry, because I could have wished to keep up a little lingering fragment of respect for him."

Here Mr. Boffin was heard lustily calling at the yard gate, "Halloa! Wegg! Halloa!"

"Keep your seat, Mr. Venus," said Wegg. "He may not stop." And then called out, "Halloa, sir! Halloa! I'm with you directly, sir! Half a minute, Mr. Boffin. Coming, sir, as fast as my leg will bring me!" And so with a show of much cheerful alacrity stumped out to the gate with a light, and there, through the window of a cab, descried Mr. Boffin inside, blocked up with books.

Not ceasing to talk and bustle, in a state of great excitement, Mr. Boffin directed the removal and arrangement of the books, appearing to be in some sort beside himself until they were all deposited on the floor, and the cab was dismissed.

"There!" said Mr. Boffin, gloating over them. "There they are, like the four-and-twenty fiddlers—all of a row. Get on your spectacles, Wegg; I know where to find the best of 'em, and we'll have a taste at once of what we have got before us. What's your friend's name?"

Mr. Wegg presented his friend as Mr. Venus.

"Eh?" cried Mr. Boffin. "Of Clerkenwell?"

"Of Clerkenwell, sir," said Mr. Venus.

"Why, I've heard of you," cried Mr. Boffin. "I heard of you in the old man's time. You knew him. Did you ever buy anything of him?" With piercing eagerness.

"No, sir," returned Venus.

"But he showed you things; didn't he?"

Mr. Venus, with a glance at his friend, replied in the affirmative.

"What did he show you?" asked Mr. Boffin, putting his hands behind him, and eagerly advancing his head. "Did he show you boxes, little cabinets, pocket-books, parcels, anything locked or sealed, anything tied up?"

Mr. Venus shook his head.

"Are you a judge of china?"

Mr. Venus again shook his head.

"Because if he had ever showed you a tea-pot, I should be glad to know of it," said Mr. Boffin. And then with his right hand at his lips, repeated thoughtfully, "a Tea-pot, a Tea-pot," and glanced over the books on the floor, as if he knew there was something interesting connected with a tea-pot, somewhere among them. Producing a little book from his breast-pocket, he handed it with great care to the literary gentleman, and inquired, "What do you call that, Wegg?"

"This, sir," replied Silas, adjusting his spectacles, and referring to the title-page, "is Merryweather's Lives and Anecdotes of Misers."

"Which of 'em have you got in that lot?" asked Mr. Boffin. "Can you find out pretty easy?"

"Well, sir," replied Silas, turning to the table of contents and slowly fluttering the leaves of the book, "I should say they must be pretty well all here, sir; here's a large assortment, sir; my eye catches John Overs, sir, John Little, sir, Dick Jarrel, John Elwes, the Reverend Mr. Jones of Blewbury, Vulture Hopkins, Daniel Dancer—"

"Give us Dancer, Wegg," said Mr. Boffin.

"Page a hundred and nine, Mr. Boffin. Chapter eight. Contents of chapter, 'His birth and estate. His garments and outward appearance. Miss Dancer and her feminine graces. The Miser's Mansion. The finding of a treasure. The Story of the Mutton Pies. A Miser's Idea of Death.

Bob, the Miser's cur. Griffiths and his Master. How to turn a penny. A substitute for a Fire. The Advantages of keeping a Snuff-box. The Miser dies without a Shirt. The Treasures of a Dunghill—'

"Eh? What's that?" demanded Mr. Boffin.

"'The Treasures,' sir," repeated Silas, reading very distinctly, "'of a Dunghill.' Mr. Venus, sir, would you oblige with the snuffers?" This, to secure attention to his adding with his lips only, "Mounds!"

Mr. Boffin drew an arm-chair into the space where he stood, and said, seating himself and slyly rubbing his hands:

"Give us Dancer."

Mr. Wegg pursued the biography of that eminent man through its various phases of avarice and dirt, after which he read on as follows:

"'The house, or rather the heap of ruins, in which Mr. Dancer lived, and which at his death devolved to the right of Captain Holmes, was a most miserable, decayed building, for it had not been repaired for more than half a century. But though poor in external structure, the ruinous fabric was very rich in the interior. One of Mr. Dancer's richest escritaires was found to be a dungheap in the cowhouse; a sum but little short of two thousand five hundred pounds was contained in this rich piece of manure; and in an old jacket, carefully tied, and strongly nailed down to the manger, in bank notes and gold were found five hundred pounds more. Several bowls were discovered filled with guineas and half-guineas; and at different times on searching the corners of the house they found various parcels of bank notes. Some were crammed into the crevices of the wall; bundles were hid under the cushions and covers of the chairs; some were reposing snugly at the back of the drawers; and notes amounting to six hundred pounds were found neatly doubled up in the inside of an old tea-pot. In the stable the Captain found jugs full of old dollars and shillings. The chimney was not left unsearched, and paid very well for the trouble; for in nineteen different holes, all filled with soot, were found various sums of money, amounting together to more than two hundred pounds.'"

"Let's have some more," said Mr. Boffin, hungrily. "Do you like it?" he asked, turning suddenly to Mr. Venus.

Mr. Venus answered that he found it very interesting.

"Then come again," said Mr. Boffin, "and hear some more. Come when you like; come the day after to-morrow, half an hour sooner. There's plenty more; there's no end to it. It's wonderful what's been hid, at one time or another," said Mr. Boffin, ruminating; "money. Ah! And papers."

Mr. Wegg, in a languid transport, dropped over on Mr. Venus, and recovering himself, masked his emotions with a sneeze.

"Tish-ho! Did you say papers too, sir? Hidden, sir?"

"Hidden and forgot," said Mr. Boffin. "Men put away and forget, or mean to destroy, and don't!" He then added in a slow tone, "As—ton—ish—ing!" And as he rolled his eyes all round the room, Wegg and Venus likewise rolled their eyes all round the room.

"However, time's up for to-night," said Mr. Boffin, waving his hand after a silence. "More the day after to-morrow. Range the books upon the shelves, Wegg. I dare say, Mr. Venus will be so kind as to help you."

While speaking, he thrust his hand into the breast of his outer coat, and struggled with some object that was too large to be got out easily. What was the stupefaction of the friendly movers when this object at last emerging, proved to be a much-dilapidated dark lantern!

Without at all noticing the effect produced by this little instrument, Mr. Boffin stood it on his knee, and, producing a box of matches, deliberately lighted the candle in the lantern, blew out the kindled match, and cast the end into the fire. "I'm going, Wegg," he then announced, "to take a turn about the place and round the yard. I don't want you. Me and this same lantern have taken hundreds—thousands of such turns in our time together."

Wegg had nothing for it but to let Mr. Boffin go out and shut the door behind him. But, the instant he was on the other side of it, Wegg clutched Venus with both hands, and said in a choking whisper, as if he were being strangled:

"Mr. Venus, he must be followed, he must be watched, he mustn't be lost sight of for a moment."

"Why mustn't he?" asked Mr. Venus, also strangling.

"Comrade, you might have noticed I was a little elevated in spirits when you come in to-night. I've found something."

"What have you found?" asked Venus, clutching him with both hands, so that they stood interlocked like a couple of preposterous gladiators.

"There's no time to tell you now. I think he must have gone to look for it. We must have an eye upon him instantly."

Releasing each other, they crept to the door, opened it softly, and peeped out. It was a cloudy night, and the black shadow of the Mounds made the dark yard darker. "If not a double swindler," whispered Wegg, "why a dark lantern? We could have seen what he was about, if he had carried a light one. Softly, this way."

Cautiously along the path that was bordered by fragments of crockery set in ashes, the two stole after him. "He knows the place by heart," muttered Silas, "and don't need to turn his lantern on, confound him!" But he did turn it on, almost at the same instant, and flashed its light upon the first of the mounds.

"He's warm," said Silas. "He's precious warm. He's close. I think he must be going to look for it."

He darkened his lantern again, and the mound turned black. After a few seconds, he turned the light on once more, and was seen standing at the foot of the second mound, slowly raising the lantern little by little until he held it up at arm's length, as if he were examining the condition of the whole surface.

"He's getting cold," said Wegg.

"It strikes me," whispered Venus, "that he wants to find out whether any one has been groping about there."

"Hush!" returned Wegg, "he's getting colder and colder.—Now he's freezing!"

He had turned the lantern off again, and on again, and was visible at the foot of the third mound.

"Why, he's going up it!" said Venus.

"Shovel and all!" said Wegg.

At a nimbler trot, as if the shovel over his shoulder stimulated him by reviving old associations, Mr. Boffin ascended

the "serpentine walk," up the Mound. On striking into it he turned his lantern off. The two followed him, stooping low, so that their figures might make no mark in relief against the sky when he should turn his lantern on again.

Gaining the top of the Mound, he turned on his light—but only partially—and stood it on the ground. He tucked up his cuffs and spat on his hands, and then went at it like an old digger as he was. Some dozen or so of expert strokes sufficed. Then he stopped, looked down into the cavity, bent over it, and took out what appeared to be an ordinary case-bottle. As soon as he had done this, he turned off his lantern, and they could hear that he was filling up the hole in the dark. The ashes being easily moved by a skillful hand, the spies took this as a hint to make off in good time.

Mr. Boffin came down leisurely.

"What's the matter, Wegg?" said he. "You are as pale as a candle."

Mr. Wegg replied that he felt as if he had had a turn.

"Bile," said Mr. Boffin, blowing out the light in the lantern, shutting it up, and stowing it away in the breast of his coat as before. "Physic yourself to-morrow, Wegg, to be in order for next night. By-the-by, this neighborhood is going to have a loss, Wegg."

"A loss, sir?"

"Going to lose the Mounds."

"Have you parted with them, Mr. Boffin?" asked Silas.

"Yes; they're going. Mine's as good as gone already."

"You mean the little one, with a pole atop, sir."

"Yes," said Mr. Boffin, rubbing his ear in his old way, with that new touch of craftiness added to it. "It has fetched a penny. It'll begin to be carted off to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE friendly movers sat panting and eyeing one another, after Mr. Boffin had slammed the gate and gone away. In the weak eyes of Venus and in every reddish dust-colored hair in his shock of hair, there was a marked distrust of Wegg and an alertness to fly at him on perceiving the smallest occasion. In the hard-grained face of Wegg, and in his stiff

knotty figure, there was expressed a politic conciliation, which had no spontaneity in it.

"Comrade," said Wegg, "what a speaking countenance is yours! Clearly do I know what question your expressive features put to me."

"What question?" said Venus.

"The question," returned Wegg, with a sort of joyful affability, "why I didn't mention sooner, that I had found something. Now, you can't read in my face what answer I give?"

"No, I can't," said Venus.

"I knew it! And why not?" returned Wegg, with the same joyful candor. "Because I lay no claims to a speaking countenance. But I can answer in words. And in what words? These. I wanted to give you a delightful sap—pur—IZE! Your speaking countenance, being answered to its satisfaction, only asks then, 'What have you found?' Man and brother, partner in feelings equally with undertakings and actions, I have found a cash-box. A small flat oblong cash-box. Shall I say it was disappointingly light?"

"There were papers in it," said Venus.

"There your expressive countenance speaks indeed!" cried Wegg. "A paper. The box was locked, tied up, and sealed, and on it was a parchment label, with the writing, 'MY WILL, JOHN HARMON, TEMPORARILY DEPOSITED HERE.'"

"We must know its contents," said Venus.

"—Hear me out," cried Wegg. "I said so, and I broke the box open."

"Without coming to me!" exclaimed Venus.

"Exactly so, sir!" returned Wegg, blandly and buoyantly. "I see I take you with me! Hear, hear, hear! Resolved, as your discriminating good sense perceives, that if you was to have a sap—pur—IZE, it should be a complete one! Well, sir, and so you have honored me by anticipating, I examined the document. Regularly executed, regularly witnessed, very short. Inasmuch as he has never made friends, and has ever had a rebellious family, he, John Harmon, gives to Nicodemus Boffin the Little Mound, which is quite enough for him, and gives the whole rest and residue of his property to the Crown."

"The date of the will that has been proved must be looked to," remarked Venus. "It may be later than this one."

"—Hear me out!" cried Wegg. "I said so. I paid a shilling (never mind your sixpence of it) to look up that will. Brother, that will is dated months before this will. And now, as a fellow-man, and as a partner in a friendly move," added Wegg, benignantly taking him by both hands again, and clapping him on both knees again, "say, have I completed my labor of love to your perfect satisfaction, and are you sap—pur—IZED?"

Mr. Venus contemplated his fellow-man and partner with doubting eyes, and then rejoined stiffly:

"This is great news indeed, Mr. Wegg. There's no denying it. But I could have wished you had told it me before you got your fright to-night, and I could have wished you had ever asked me as your partner what we were to do."

"—Hear me out!" cried Wegg. "I knew you was a-going to say so. But alone I bore the anxiety, and alone I'll bear the blame!"

"Now," said Venus. "Let's see this will and this box."

"Do I understand, brother," returned Wegg with considerable reluctance, "that it is your wish to see this will and this—?"

Mr. Venus smote the table with his hand.

"Hear me out!" said Wegg. "Hear me out! I'll go and fetch 'em."

After being some time absent, as if in his covetousness he could hardly make up his mind to produce the treasure to his partner, he returned with an old leathern hat-box, into which he had put the other box, for the better preservation of commonplace appearances, and for the disarming of suspicion. "But I don't half like opening it here," said Silas in a low voice, looking around: "he might come back, he may not be gone; we don't know what he may be up to, after what we've seen."

"There's something in that," assented Venus. "Come to my place."

Not very well seeing his way to a refusal, Mr. Wegg then rejoined in a gush, "Hear me out!—Certainly." So he locked up the Bower and they set forth.

"Now, sir," said Venus, when they were safely in his shop, "let us see this discovery."

Wegg reluctantly opened the hat-box and revealed the cash-box, opened the cash-box and revealed the will. He held a corner of it tight, while Venus, taking hold of another corner, searchingly and attentively read it.

"Was I correct in my account of it, partner?"

"Partner, you were."

Mr. Wegg made an easy graceful movement, as though he would fold it up; but Mr. Venus held on by his corner.

"No, sir," said Mr. Venus, winking his weak eyes and shaking his head. "No, partner. The question is now brought up, who is going to take care of this. Do you know who is going to take care of this, partner?"

"I am," said Wegg.

"Oh dear no, partner," retorted Venus. "That's a mistake. I am. Now look here, Mr. Wegg. I don't want to have any words with you, and still less do I want to have any anatomical pursuits with you."

"What do you mean?" said Wegg, quickly.

"I mean, partner," replied Venus, slowly, "that it's hardly possible for a man to feel in a more amiable state towards another man than I do towards you at this present moment. But I am on my own ground, I am surrounded by the trophies of my art, and my tools is very handy. There's the Miscellanies of several human specimens (though you mightn't think it) in the box on which you're sitting. There's the Miscellanies of several human specimens, in the lovely compo-one behind the door;" with a nod towards the French gentleman. "It still wants a pair of arms. I *don't* say that I'm in any hurry for 'em."

"You must be wandering in your mind, partner," Silas remonstrated.

"You'll excuse me if I wander," returned Venus; "I am sometimes rather subject to it. I like my art, and I know how to exercise my art, and I mean to have the keeping of this document."

"Partner," said Wegg, after a silence, "don't your speaking countenance say that you're a-going to suggest a middle course?"

Venus shook his shock of hair as he replied, "Partner, you have kept this paper from me once. You shall never keep it from me again. I offer you the box and the label to take care of, but I'll take care of the paper."

Silas hesitated a little longer, and then suddenly releasing his corner, and resuming his buoyant and benignant tone, exclaimed, "What's life without trustfulness! What's a fellow-man without honor! You're welcome to it, partner, in a spirit of trust and confidence."

Mr. Venus folded the paper now left in his hand, and locked it in a drawer behind him, and pocketed the key.

"Next," said he, "comes the question, What's the course to be pursued?"

On this head, Silas Wegg had much to say. The fortunes of his brother and comrade, and of himself, were evidently made, inasmuch as they had but to put their price upon this document, and get that price from the minion of fortune and the worm of the hour, who now appeared to be less of a minion and more of a worm than had been previously supposed. Wegg considered it plain that such a price was statable in a single expressive word, and that the word was "Halves!" The plan of action was that they should lie by with patience; that they should allow the Mounds to be gradually leveled and cleared away, while retaining to themselves their present opportunity of watching the process—which would be, he conceived, to put the trouble and cost of daily digging and delving upon somebody else, while they might nightly turn such complete disturbance of the dust to the account of their own private investigations—and that, when the Mounds were gone, and they had worked those chances for their own joint benefit solely, they should then, and not before, explode on the minion and worm.

"Brother," said Wegg, when this happy understanding was established, "I should like to ask you something. There you sit, sir, in the midst of your works, looking as if you'd been called upon for Home, Sweet Home, and was obleeing the company!"

'A exile from home splendor dazzles in vain,
'O give you your lowly preparations again,
'The birds stuffed so sweetly that can't be expected to come at your call
'Give you these with the peace of mind dearer than all.
'Home, Home, Home, sweet Home!'

—Be it ever," added Mr. Wegg in prose as he glanced about the shop, "ever so ghastly, all things considered there's no place like it. *How's it going on? Is it looking up at all?*"

"She does not wish," replied Mr. Venus, "to regard herself, nor yet to be regarded, in that particular light. There's no more to be said."

"You didn't mention her name, sir, I think?" observed Wegg, pensively. "No, you didn't mention her name that night."

"Pleasant Riderhood."

"In—deed!" cried Wegg. "Pleasant Riderhood. There's something moving in the name. Pleasant. Dear me! Seems to express what she might have been, if she hadn't made that unpleasant remark—and what she ain't, in consequence of having made it."

Seeming for the time to have lost his power of assuming an interest in the woes of Mr. Venus, Silas fell to tightening his wooden leg as a preparation for departure.

CHAPTER XXXV.

OLD Betty Higden fared upon her pilgrimage as many ruggedly honest creatures, women and men, fare on their toiling way along the roads of life.

Nothing had been heard of her at Mrs. Boffin's house since she trudged off. The weather had been hard and the roads had been bad, and her spirit was up.

Faithful soul! When she had spoken to the Secretary of "that deadness that steals over me at times," her fortitude had made too little of it. Oftener and ever oftener, it came stealing over her; darker and ever darker, like the shadow of advancing Death.

She was traveling along by a part of the road where it touched the river, and in wet seasons was so often overflowed by it that there were tall white posts set up to mark the way. A barge was being towed towards her, and she sat down on the bank to rest and watch it. As the tow-rope was slackened by a turn of the stream and dipped into the water, such a confusion stole into her mind that she thought she saw the forms of her dead children and dead grandchild.

dren peopling the barge, and waving their hands to her in solemn measure; then, as the rope tightened and came up, dropping diamonds, it seemed to vibrate into two parallel ropes and strike her, with a twang, though it was far off. When she looked again, there was no barge, no river, no daylight, and a man held a candle close to her face.

"Now, Missis," said he; "where did you come from and where are you going to?"

The poor soul confusedly asked where she was.

"I am the Lock," said the man.

"The Lock?"

"I am the Deputy Lock, on job, and this is the Lock-house. (Lock or Deputy Lock, it's all one, while the t'other man's in the hospital.) What's your Parish?"

"Parish!" She was up from the truckle-bed directly, wildly feeling about her for her basket; and gazing at him in affright.

"You'll be asked the question down town," said the man. "They won't let you be more than a Casual there. They'll pass you on to your settlement, Missis, with all speed. You're not in a state to be let come upon strange parishes 'ceptin' as a Casual."

"'Twas the deadness again!" murmured Betty Higden.

"It was the deadness, there's not a doubt about it," returned the man. "I should have thought the deadness was a mild word for it, if it had been named to me when we brought you in. Have you got any friends, Missis?"

"The best of friends, Master."

"I should recommend your looking 'em up if you consider 'em game to do anything for you," said the Deputy Lock.

"Have you got any money?"

"Just a morsel of money, sir."

"Do you want to keep it?"

"Sure I do!"

"Well, you know," said the Deputy Lock, shrugging his shoulders with his hands in his pockets, and shaking his head in a sulkily ominous manner, "the parish authorities down town will have it out of you, if you go on, you may take your Alfred David."

"Then I'll not go on."

"They'll make you pay, as fur as your money will go," pursued the Deputy, "for your relief as a Casual and for your being passed to your Parish."

"Thank ye kindly, Master, for your warning, thank ye for your shelter, and good-night."

"Stop a bit," said the Deputy, striking in between her and the door. "Why are you all of a shake, and what's your hurry, Missis?"

"Oh, Master, Master," returned Betty Higden, "I've fought against the Parish and fled from it all my life, and I want to die free of it."

"I don't know," said the Deputy, with deliberation, "as I ought to let you go. I'm a honest man as gets my living by the sweat of my brow, and I may fall into trouble by letting you go. I've fell into trouble afore now, by George, and I know what it is, and it's made me careful. You might be took with your deadness again, half a mile off—or half of half a quarter, for the matter of that—and then it would be asked, Why did that there honest Deputy Lock let her go, instead of putting her safe with the Parish? What amount of small change, Missis," he said, with an abstracted air, after a little meditation, "might you call a morsel of money?"

Hurriedly emptying her pocket, old Betty laid down on the table, a shilling, and two sixpenny pieces, and a few pence.

"If I was to let you go instead of handing you over safe to the Parish," said the Deputy, "might it be your own free wish to leave that there behind you?"

"Take it, Master, take it, and welcome and thankful!"

"I'm a man," said the Deputy, pocketing the coins, one by one, "as earns his living by the sweat of his brow; and I won't stand in your way. Go where you like."

She was gone out of the Lock-house, as soon as he gave her this permission, and her tottering steps were on the road again. But she struck off by side ways, among which she got bewildered and lost.

The morning found her afoot again, but fast declining as to the clearness of her thoughts, though not as to the steadiness of her purpose.

Sewn in the breast of her gown, the money to pay for her

burial was still intact. If she could wear through the day, and then lie down to die under cover of the darkness, she would die independent.

So, keeping to by-ways, and shunning human approach, this troublesome old woman hid herself, and fared on all through the dreary day. Yet so unlike was she to vagrant hiders in general, that sometimes as the day advanced, there was a bright fire in her eyes, and a quicker beating at her feeble heart, as though she said exultingly, "The Lord will see me through it!"

"Water-meadows, or such like," she had sometimes murmured, on the day's pilgrimage, when she had raised her head and taken any note of the real objects about her. There now arose in the darkness, a great building, full of lighted windows. Smoke was issuing from a high chimney in the rear of it, and there was the sound of a water-wheel at the side. Between her and the building lay a piece of water, in which the lighted windows were reflected, and on its nearest margin was a plantation of trees. "I humbly thank the Power and the Glory," said Betty Higden, holding up her withered hands, "that I have come to my journey's end!"

She crept among the trees to the trunk of a tree whence she could see, beyond some intervening trees and branches, the lighted windows, both in their reality and their reflection in the water. She placed her orderly little basket at her side, and sank upon the ground, supporting herself against the tree. It brought to her mind the foot of the Cross, and she committed herself to Him who died upon it. Her strength held out to enable her to arrange the letter in her breast, so that it could be seen that she had a paper there. It had held out for this, and it departed when this was done.

"I am safe here," was her last benumbed thought. "When I am found dead at the foot of the Cross, it will be by some of my own sort; some of the working people who work among the lights yonder. I cannot see the lighted windows now, but they are there. I am thankful for all."

* * * * *

The darkness gone, and a face bending down.

"It cannot be the boofer lady?"

"I don't understand what you say. Let me wet your lips again with this brandy. I have been away to fetch it."

It is as the face of a woman, shaded by a quantity of rich dark hair. It is the earnest face of a woman who is young and handsome. But all is over with me on earth, and this must be an Angel.

"Have I been long dead?"

"I don't understand what you say. Let me wet your lips again. I hurried all I could, and brought no one back with me, lest you should die of the shock of strangers."

"Am I not dead?"

"I cannot understand what you say. Your voice is so low and broken that I cannot hear you. Do you hear me?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean Yes?"

"Yes."

"I was coming from my work just now, along the path outside (I was up with the night hands last night), and I heard a groan, and found you lying here."

"What work, deary?"

"Did you ask what work? At the paper-mill."

"Where is it?"

"Your face is turned up to the sky, and you can't see it. It is close by. You can see my face, here, between you and the sky?"

"Yes."

"Dare I lift you?"

"Not yet."

"Not even lift your head to get it on my arm? I will do it by very gentle degrees. You shall hardly feel it."

"Not yet. Paper. Letter."

"This paper in your breast?"

"Bless ye!"

"Let me wet your lips again. Am I to open it? To read it?"

"Bless ye!"

She reads it with surprise, and looks down with a new expression and an added interest on the motionless face she kneels beside.

"I know these names. I have heard them often."

"Will you send it, my dear?"

"I cannot understand you. Let me wet your lips again, and your forehead. There. O poor thing, poor thing!" These words through her fast dropping tears. "What was it that you asked me? Wait till I bring my ear quite close."

"Will you send it, my dear?"

"Will I send it to the writers? Yes, certainly."

"You will not give it up to any one but them?"

"No."

"As you must grow old in time, and come to your dying hour, my dear, you'll not give it up to any one but them?"

"No. Most solemnly."

"Never to the Parish!" with a convulsed struggle.

"No. Most solemnly."

"Nor let the Parish touch me, nor yet so much as look at me!" with another struggle.

"No. Faithfully."

A look of thankfulness and triumph lighted the worn old face. The eyes which have been darkly fixed upon the sky, turn with meaning in them towards the compassionate face from which the tears are dropping, and a smile is on the aged lips as they ask:

"What is your name, my dear?"

"My name is Lizzie Hexam."

"I must be sore disfigured. Are you afraid to kiss me?"

The answer is, the ready pressure of her lips upon the cold but smiling mouth.

"Bless ye! *Now* lift me, my love."

Lizzie Hexam very softly raised the weather-stained gray head, and lifted her as high as Heaven.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"**W**E GIVE THEE HEARTY THANKS FOR THAT IT HATH PLEASED THEE TO DELIVER THIS OUR SISTER OUT OF THE MISERIES OF THIS SINFUL WORLD.'" So read the Reverend Frank Milvey, above the ashes of Betty Higden, in a corner of a church-yard near the river.

Near unto the Reverend Frank Milvey as he read, stood his little wife, John Rokesmith the Secretary, and Bella

Wilfer. These, over and above Sloppy, were the mourners at the lowly grave. Not a penny had been added to the money sewn in her dress: what her honest spirit had so long projected, was fulfilled.

"I've took it in my head," said Sloppy, laying it, inconsolable, against the church door, when all was done: "I've took it in my wretched head that I might have sometimes turned a little harder for her, and it cuts me deep to think so now."

The Reverend Frank Milvey, comforting Sloppy, expounded to him how the best of us were more or less remiss in our turnings at our respective Mangles—some of us very much so—and how we were all a halting, failing, feeble, and inconstant crew.

"*She warn't, sir,*" said Sloppy, taking this ghostly counsel rather ill, in behalf of his late benefactress. "Let us speak for ourselves, sir. She went through with whatever duty she had to do. She went through with me, she went through with the Minders, she went through with herself, she went through with everythink. O Mrs. Higden, Mrs. Higden, you was a woman and a mother and a mangler in a million million!"

They passed out at the wicket-gate. The water-wheel of the paper-mill was audible there, and seemed to have a softening influence on the bright wintry scene. They had arrived but a little while before, and Lizzie Hexam now told them the little she could add to the letter in which she had enclosed Mr. Rokesmith's letter and had asked for their instructions.

Bella and the Secretary observed Lizzie Hexam with great attention. Brought face to face for the first time with the daughter of his supposed murderer, it was natural that John Harmon should have his own secret reasons for a careful scrutiny of her countenance and manner. Bella knew that Lizzie's father had been falsely accused of the crime which had had so great an influence on her own life and fortunes; and her interest was equally natural. Both had expected to see something very different from the real Lizzie Hexam, and thus it fell out that she became the unconscious means of bringing them together.

For when they had walked on with her to the little house in the clean village by the paper-mill, where Lizzie had a lodging with an elderly couple employed in the establishment, and when Mrs. Milvey and Bella had been up to see her room and had come down, the mill bell rang. This called Lizzie away for the time, and left the Secretary and Bella standing rather awkwardly in the small street.

After a little stiff conversation, in which she was conscious of making all the advances, Bella exclaimed:

"Oh, Mr. Rokesmith, don't be hard with me, don't be stern with me; be magnanimous! I want to talk with you on equal terms."

"Upon my honor I had no thought but for you," returned the Secretary, suddenly brightening, "I forced myself to be constrained, lest you might misinterpret my being more natural."

"Thank you," said Bella, holding out her little hand. "Forgive me."

"No!" cried the Secretary, eagerly. "Forgive *me*! You remember, of course, that in Lizzie's short letter to Mrs. Boffin, she stipulated that either her name, or else her place of residence, must be kept strictly a secret among us. It is my duty to find out why she made that stipulation. If you would speak with her alone before we go away from here, I feel quite sure that a natural and easy confidence would arise between you. If you do not object to put this question to her—to ascertain for us her own feeling in this one matter—you can do so at a far greater advantage than I or any one else could. Mr. Boffin is anxious on the subject. And I am," added the Secretary after a moment, "for a special reason, very anxious."

"I shall be happy, Mr. Rokesmith," returned Bella, "to be of the least use; for I feel, after the serious scene of to-day, that I am useless enough in this world."

"Don't say that," urged the Secretary. "I don't like to hear you depreciate yourself."

"Mr. Rokesmith, it seems so long since we spoke together naturally, that I am embarrassed in approaching another subject. Mr. Boffin. You know I am very grateful to him; don't you? You know I feel a true respect for him, and am

bound to him by the strong ties of his own generosity ; now don't you ? ”

“ Unquestionably. And also that you are his favorite companion. ”

“ That makes it, ” said Bella, “ so very difficult to speak of him. But— Does he treat you well ? ”

“ You see how he treats me, ” the Secretary answered, with a patient and yet proud air.

“ Yes, and I see it with pain, ” said Bella, energetically.

The Secretary gave her a radiant look.

“ I see it with pain, ” repeated Bella, “ and it often makes me miserable, because I cannot bear to be forced to admit to myself that Fortune is spoiling Mr. Boffin. ”

“ Miss Wilfer, ” said the Secretary, with a beaming face, “ if you could know with what delight I make the discovery that Fortune is not spoiling *you*, you would know that it more than compensates me for any slight at any other hands. ”

“ Oh, don't speak of *me*. You don't know me as well as— ”

“ As you know yourself ? ” suggested the Secretary, finding that she stopped. “ *Do you know yourself ?* ”

“ I know quite enough of myself, and I don't improve upon acquaintance. But Mr. Boffin. ”

“ That Mr. Boffin's manner to me, or consideration for me, is not what it used to be, must be admitted. ”

“ It must try you very much, and—you must please promise me that you won't take ill what I am going to add, Mr. Rokesmith ? ”

“ I promise it with all my heart. ”

“—And it must sometimes, I should think, a little lower you in your own estimation ? ”

“ I have very strong reasons, Miss Wilfer, for bearing with the drawbacks of my position in the house we both inhabit. Believe that they are not all mercenary, although I have, through a series of strange fatalities, faded out of my place in life. ”

“ I think I have noticed, ” said Bella, looking at him with curiosity, as not quite making him out, “ that you repress yourself, and force yourself to act a passive part. ”

“ You are right. I repress myself and force myself to act a part. I have a settled purpose. ”

"And a good one, I hope," said Bella.

"And a good one, I hope," he answered.

"Sometimes I have fancied, sir, that your great regard for Mrs. Boffin is a very powerful motive with you."

"You are right again; it is. I would do anything for her, bear anything for her. There are no words to express how I esteem that good, good woman."

"As I do too! May I ask you one thing more?"

"Anything more."

"Of course you see that she really suffers, when Mr. Boffin shows how he is changing?"

"I see it, every day, and am grieved to give her pain."

"To give her pain?" said Bella, repeating the phrase quickly, with her eyebrows raised.

"I am generally the unfortunate cause of it."

"Perhaps she says to you, as she often says to me, that he is the best of men, in spite of all."

"I often overhear her, in her honest and beautiful devotion to him, saying so to you," returned the Secretary, "but I cannot assert that she ever says so to me."

Bella met his steady look for a moment with a wistful, musing little look of her own, and then heaved a little sigh, and gave up things in general for a bad job.

So they got back to the village as Lizzie Hexam was coming from the paper-mill, and Bella detached herself to speak with her in her own home.

She set forth that request of Lizzie's touching secrecy, and delicately spoke of that false accusation and its retractation, and asked might she beg to be informed whether it had any bearing, near or remote, on such request.

"Has the accusation anything to do with my wishing to live quite secret and retired here? No."

As Lizzie Hexam shook her head in giving this reply and as her glance sought the fire, there was a quiet resolution in her folded hands, not lost on Bella's bright eyes.

"Have you lived much alone?" asked Bella.

"Yes. It's nothing new to me. I used to be always alone many hours together, in the day and in the night, when poor father was alive."

"Tell me, my dear," said Bella, "what is the matter, and why you live like this."

Lizzie presently began, by way of prelude, "You must have many lovers—" when Bella checked her with a little scream of astonishment.

"My dear, I haven't one!"

"Not one?"

"Well! Perhaps one," said Bella. "I am sure I don't know. I *had* one, but what he may think about it at the present time I can't say. Perhaps I have half a one (of course I don't count that Idiot, George Sampson). However, never mind me. I want to hear about you."

"There is a certain man," said Lizzie, "a passionate and angry man, who says he loves me, and who I must believe does love me. He is the friend of my brother. I shrank from him within myself when my brother first brought him to me; but the last time I saw him he terrified me more than I can say." There she stopped.

"Did you come here to escape from him, Lizzie?"

"I came here immediately after he so alarmed me."

"Are you afraid of him here?"

"I am not timid generally, but I am always afraid of him. I am afraid to see a newspaper, or to hear a word spoken of what is done in London, lest he should have done some violence."

"Then you are not afraid of him for yourself, dear?"

"I should be even that, if I met him about here. I look round for him always, as I pass to and fro at night."

"Are you afraid of anything he may do to himself in London, my dear?"

"No. He might be fierce enough even to do some violence to himself, but I don't think of that."

"Then it would almost seem, dear," said Bella, quaintly, "as if there must be somebody else."

Lizzie put her hands before her face for a moment before replying: "The words are always in my ears, and the blow he struck upon a stone wall as he said them is always before my eyes. I have tried hard to think it not worth remembering, but I cannot make so little of it. His hand was trickling down with blood as he said to me, 'Then I hope that I may never kill him!'"

Rather startled, Bella made and clasped a girdle of her

arms round Lizzie's waist, and then asked quietly, in a soft voice, as they both looked at the fire :

"Kill him ! Is this man so jealous, then ?"

"Of a gentleman," said Lizzie. "—I hardly know how to tell you—of a gentleman far above me and my way of life, who broke father's death to me, and has shown an interest in me since."

"Does he love you ?"

Lizzie shook her head.

"Does he admire you ?"

Lizzie ceased to shake her head, and pressed her hand upon her living girdle.

"Is it through his influence that you came here ?"

"O no ! And of all the world I wouldn't have him know that I am here, or get the least clue where to find me."

"Lizzie, dear ! Why ?" asked Bella, in amazement at this burst. But then quickly added, reading Lizzie's face : "No. Don't say why. That was a foolish question of mine. I see, I see."

There was silence between them. Lizzie, with a drooping head, glanced down at the glow in the fire.

"You know all now," she said, raising her eyes to Bella's. "There is nothing left out. I have a kind of picture of him—or of what he might have been, if I had been a lady, and he loved me—which is always with me, and which I somehow feel that I could not do a mean or a wrong thing before. I prize the remembrance that he has done me nothing but good since I have known him, and that he has made a change within me, like—like the change in the grain of these hands, which were coarse, and cracked, and hard, and brown when I rowed on the river with father, and are softened and made supple by this new work as you see them now."

They trembled, but with no weakness, as she showed them.

"Understand me, my dear ;" thus she went on. "I have never dreamed of the possibility of his being anything to me on this earth but the kind of picture that I know I could not make you understand, if the understanding was not in your own breast already. I have no more dreamed of the possibility of *my* being his wife, than he ever has—and words

could not be stronger than that. And yet I love him. I love him so much, and so dearly, that when I sometimes think my life may be but a weary one, I am proud of it and glad of it. I am proud and glad to suffer something for him, even though it is of no service to him, and he will never know of it or care for it."

Bella sat enchained by the deep, unselfish passion of this girl or woman of her own age, courageously revealing itself in the confidence of her sympathetic perception of its truth. And yet she had never experienced anything like it, or thought of the existence of anything like it.

The interview terminated with pleasant words on both sides, and with many reminders on the part of Bella that they were friends, and pledges that she would soon come down into that part of the country again. Therewith Lizzie returned to the mill, and Bella ran over to the little inn.

"You look rather serious," said the Secretary.

"I feel rather serious," returned Miss Wilfer.

She had nothing else to tell but that Lizzie Hexam's secret had no reference whatever to the cruel charge, or its withdrawal. Oh yes though! said Bella; she might as well mention one other thing; Lizzie was very desirous to thank her unknown friend who had sent her the written retractation. Was she indeed? observed the Secretary. Ah! Bella asked him, had he any notion who that unknown friend might be? He had no notion whatever.

They were to return by the train presently, and, the station being near at hand, the Reverend Frank and Mrs. Frank, and Sloppy, and Bella, and the Secretary, set out to walk to it. Few rustic paths are wide enough for five, and Bella and the Secretary dropped behind.

"Can you believe, Mr. Rokesmith," said Bella, "that I feel as if whole years had passed since I went into Lizzie Hexam's cottage?"

"We have crowded a good deal into the day," he returned, "and you were much affected in the church-yard. You are over-tired."

"No, I am not at all tired. I don't mean that I feel as if a great space of time had gone by, but that I feel as if much had happened—to myself, you know."

"For good, I hope?"

"I hope so," said Bella.

"You are cold; I felt you tremble. Pray let me put this wrapper of mine about you. Now, it will be too heavy and too long. Let me carry this end over my arm, as you have no arm to give me."

Yes she had though. How she got it out, in her muffled state, Heaven knows; but she got it out somehow—there it was—and slipped it through the Secretary's.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"**A**ND so, Miss Wren," said Mr. Eugene Wrayburn, "I cannot persuade you to dress me a doll?"

"No," replied Miss Wren, snappishly; "if you want one, go and buy one at the shop."

"And my charming young goddaughter," said Mr. Wrayburn, plaintively, "down in Hertfordshire—"

("Humbugshire you mean, I think," interposed Miss Wren.)

"—is to be put upon the cold footing of the general public, and is to derive no advantage from my private acquaintance with the Court Dressmaker?"

"If it's any advantage to your charming godchild—and oh, a precious godfather she has got!"—replied Miss Wren, pricking at him in the air with her needle, "to be informed that the Court Dressmaker knows your tricks and your manners, you may tell her so by post, with my compliments."

Miss Wren was busy at her work by candle-light, and Mr. Wrayburn, half amused and half vexed, and all idle and shiftless, stood by her bench looking on. Miss Wren's troublesome child was in the corner in deep disgrace.

"Ugh, you disgraceful boy!" exclaimed Miss Wren, attracted by the sound of his chattering teeth, "I wish they'd all drop down your throat and play at dice in your stomach! Boh, wicked child! Bee-baa, black sheep!"

The wretched creature protested with a whine.

"Don't cry like that, or I'll throw a doll at you. Pay five shillings fine for you indeed! Fine in more ways than one, I think! I'd give the dustman five shillings, to carry you off in the dust cart."

"No, no," pleaded the absurd creature. "Please!"

"He's enough to break his mother's heart, is this boy," said Miss Wren, half appealing to Eugene. "I wish I had never brought him up. He'd be sharper than a serpent's tooth, if he wasn't as dull as ditch water. Look at him. There's a pretty object for a parent's eyes! There, I can't bear to look at you. Go up-stairs and get me my bonnet and shawl. Make yourself useful in some way, bad boy, and let me have your room instead of your company, for one half minute."

He shambled out, and Eugene Wrayburn saw the tears exude from between the little creature's fingers as she kept her hand before her eyes.

"I'm going to the Italian Opera to try on," said Miss Wren, taking away her hand after a little while, and laughing satirically to hide that she had been crying; "I must see your back before I go, Mr. Wrayburn. Let me first tell you, once for all, that it's of no use your paying visits to me. You wouldn't get what you want of me, no, not if you brought pincers with you to tear it out."

"Are you so obstinate on the subject of a doll's dress for my godchild?"

"Ah!" returned Miss Wren with a hitch of her chin, "I am so obstinate. And of course it's on the subject of a doll's dress—or *address*—whichever you like. Get along and give it up."

Her degraded charge had come back, and was standing behind her with the bonnet and shawl.

"Give 'em to me and get back into your corner, you naughty old thing!" said Miss Wren, as she espied him.

Eugene, with a lazy compliment or so to Miss Wren, begged leave to light his cigar and departed. He was lounging along moodily, when a most unexpected object caught his eyes. No less an object than Jenny Wren's bad boy trying to make up his mind to cross the road.

"It strikes me," remarked Eugene coolly, after watching him for some minutes, "that my friend is likely to be rather behind time if he has any appointment on hand."

Lightwood was at home when he got to the Chambers, and had dined alone there. Eugene drew a chair to the fire by

which he was having his wine and reading the evening paper, and filled a glass for good fellowship's sake.

"My dear Mortimer, you are the express picture of contented industry, reposing (on credit) after the virtuous labors of the day."

"My dear Eugene, you are the express picture of discontented idleness not reposing at all. Where have you been?"

"I have been," replied Wrayburn; "—about town. I have turned up at the present juncture, with the intention of consulting my highly intelligent and respected solicitor on the position of my affairs."

"You have fallen into the hands of the Jews, Eugene."

"My dear boy, having previously fallen into the hands of some of the Christians, I can bear it with philosophy."

"I have had an interview to-day, Eugene, with a Jew, who seems determined to press us hard. Quite a Shylock, and quite a Patriarch. A picturesque gray-headed and gray-bearded old Jew, in a shovel-hat and gaberdine."

"Not," said Eugene, pausing and setting down his glass, "surely not my worthy friend Mr. Aaron?"

"He calls himself Mr. Riah."

"Did he mention that he knew me?"

"He did not. He only said of you that he expected to be paid by you."

"Which looks," remarked Eugene with much gravity, "like *not* knowing me. I hope it may not be my worthy friend Mr. Aaron, for, to tell you the truth, Mortimer, I doubt he may have a prepossession against me. I strongly suspect him of having had a hand in spiriting away Lizzie."

"Everything," returned Lightwood, impatiently, "seems, by a fatality, to bring us round to Lizzie. 'About town' meant about Lizzie, just now, Eugene."

"My solicitor, do you know," observed Eugene, turning round to the furniture, "is a man of infinite discernment!"

"Did it not, Eugene?"

"Yes it did, Mortimer."

"And yet you know you do not really care for her."

Eugene Wrayburn rose, and put his hands in his pockets, and stood with a foot on the fender, indolently rocking his body and looking at the fire. After a prolonged pause, he

replied: "I don't know that. I must ask you not to say that, as if we took it for granted."

"But if you do care for her, so much the more should you leave her to herself."

Having again paused as before, Eugene said: "I don't know that, either. But tell me. Did you ever see me take so much trouble about anything, as about this disappearance of hers? I ask, for information."

"My dear Eugene, I wish I ever had!"

"Then you have not? Just so. You confirm my own impression. Does that look as if I cared for her? I ask, for information."

"I asked *you* for information, Eugene."

"Dear boy, I know it, but I can't give it."

Lightwood was shaking his head when a shuffling was heard at the outer door, and then an undecided knock, as though some hand were groping for the knocker. "The frolicsome youth of the neighborhood," said Eugene, "whom I should be delighted to pitch from this elevation into the church-yard below, without any intermediate ceremonies, have probably turned the lamp out. I am on duty to-night, and will see to the door."

His friend had barely had time to recall the unprecedented gleam of determination with which he had spoken of finding this girl, and which had faded out of him with the breath of the spoken words, when Eugene came back, ushering in a most disgraceful shadow of a man, shaking from head to foot, and clothed in shabby grease and smear.

"This interesting gentleman," said Eugene, "is the son—the occasionally rather trying son, for he has his failings—of a lady of my acquaintance. My dear Mortimer—Mr. Dolls." Eugene had no idea what his name was, knowing the little dressmaker's to be assumed, but presented him under the first appellation that his associations suggested.

"I gather, my dear Mortimer," pursued Eugene, as Lightwood stared at the obscene visitor, "from the manner of Mr. Dolls—which is occasionally complicated—that he desires to make some communication to me. I have mentioned to Mr. Dolls that you and I are on terms of confidence, and requested him to develop his views here."

The wretched object being much embarrassed by holding what remained of his hat, Eugene airily tossed it to the door, and put him down in a chair.

"It will be necessary, I think," he observed, "to wind up Mr. Dolls, before anything to any mortal purpose can be got out of him. Brandy, Mr. Dolls, or—?"

"Threepenn'orth Rum," said Mr. Dolls.

A judiciously small quantity of the spirit was given him.

"The nerves of Mr. Dolls," remarked Eugene, "are considerably unstrung. And I deem it on the whole expedient to fumigate Mr. Dolls."

He took the shovel from the grate, sprinkled a few live ashes on it, and from a box on the chimneypiece took a few pastiles, which he set upon them; then, with great composure, began placidly waving the shovel in front of Mr. Dolls, to cut him off from his company.

"Now then. Speak out. Don't be afraid. State your business, Dolls."

"Mist Wrayburn!" said the visitor, thickly and huskily, "you want that drection. You want t'know where she lives. Do you, Mist Wrayburn?"

With a glance at his friend, Eugene replied, "I do."

"I am er man," said Mr. Dolls, trying to smite himself on the breast, but bringing his hand to bear upon the vicinity of his eye, "er do it. I am er man er do it."

"What are you the man to do?" demanded Eugene.

"Er give up that drection."

"Can you get the direction? Do you mean that? Speak! If that's what you have come for, say how much you want."

"Ten shillings—Threepenn'orths Rum," said Mr. Dolls.

"You shall have it."

"Fifteen shillings—Threepenn'orths Rum," said Mr. Dolls, making an attempt to stiffen himself.

"You shall have it. Stop at that. How will you get the drection you talk of?"

"I am er man," said Mr. Dolls, "er get it, sir."

"How will you get it, I ask you?"

"I am ill-used vidual," said Mr. Dolls. "Blown up morn-ing t'night. Called names. She makes Mint money, sir, and never stands Threepenn'orth Rum. She looks upon me

as a mere child, sir. I am NOT mere child, sir. Man. Man talent. Lerrers pass betwixt 'em. Postman lerrers. Easy for man talent er get drection, as get his own drection."

"Get it then," said Eugene; adding very heartily under his breath, "—You Brute!—Get it, and bring it here to me, and earn the money for sixty threepenn'orth's of rum, and drink them all, one a-top of another, and drink yourself dead with all possible expedition."

Eugene picked up his worn out hat with the tongs, clapped it on his head, and, taking him by the collar—all this at arm's length—conducted him down-stairs and out of the precincts into Fleet Street. There he turned his face westward, and left him.

When he got back Lightwood was standing over the fire.

"I'll wash my hands of Mr. Dolls—physically—" said Eugene, "and be with you again directly, Mortimer."

"I would much prefer," retorted Mortimer, "your washing your hands of Mr. Dolls, morally, Eugene."

"So would I," said Eugene, "but you see, dear boy, I can't do without him. I am a little ashamed of it myself, and therefore let us change the subject."

"It is so deplorably underhanded, it is so unworthy of you, this setting on of such a shameful scout."

"We have changed the subject!" exclaimed Eugene, airily. "We have found a new one in that word, scout. Don't be like Patience on a mantel-piece frowning at Dolls, but sit down, and I'll tell you something that you really will find amusing. Take a cigar. Look at this of mine! I light it—draw one puff—breathe the smoke out—there it goes—it's Dolls!—it's gone—and being gone you are a man again."

"Your subject," said Mortimer, after lighting a cigar, "was scouts, Eugene."

"Exactly. Isn't it droll that I never go out after dark, but I find myself attended, always by one scout, and often by two?"

Lightwood looked at his friend, as if with a latent suspicion that there must be a jest or hidden meaning in his words.

"On my honor, no," said Wrayburn, answering the look

and smiling carelessly ; " I don't wonder at your supposing so, but on my honor, no. I say what I mean. I never go out after dark, but I find myself in the ludicrous situation of being followed and observed at a distance, always by one scout, and often by two."

" Are you sure, Eugene ? "

" Sure ? My dear boy, they are always the same."

" But there's no process out against you. The Jews only threaten. They have done nothing. Besides, they know where to find you, and I represent you. Why take the trouble ? "

" Observe the legal mind ! " remarked Eugene, turning round to the furniture again, with an air of indolent rapture. " Respected solicitor, it's not that. The schoolmaster's abroad."

" The schoolmaster ? "

" Ay ! Sometimes the schoolmaster and the pupil are both abroad. Why, how soon you rust in my absence ! You don't understand yet ? Those fellows who were here one night. They are the scouts I speak of."

" How long has this been going on ? " asked Lightwood.

" I apprehend it has been going on ever since a certain person went off."

" Do you think they suppose you have inveigled her away ? "

" My dear Mortimer, you know the absorbing nature of my professional occupations ; I really have not had leisure to think about it."

" Have you asked them what they want ? Have you objected ? "

" Why should I ask them what they want, dear fellow, when I am indifferent what they want ? Why should I express objection, when I don't object ? "

" You are in your most reckless mood. But you called the situation just now, a ludicrous one ; and most men object to that, even those who are indifferent to everything else."

" You charm me, Mortimer, with your reading of my weaknesses. I own to the weakness of objecting to occupy a ludicrous position, and therefore I transfer the position to the scouts. I goad the schoolmaster to madness. I make

the schoolmaster so ridiculous, and so aware of being made ridiculous, that I see him chafe and fret at every pore when we cross one another. The amiable occupation has been the solace of my life, since I was baulked in the manner unnecessary to recall. I do it thus: I stroll out after dark, stroll a little way, look in at a window and furtively look out for the schoolmaster. Sooner or later, I perceive the schoolmaster on the watch; sometimes accompanied by his hopeful pupil; oftener, pupil-less. Having made sure of his watching me, I tempt him on, all over London. One night I go east, another night north, in a few nights I go all round the compass. Sometimes, I walk; sometimes, I proceed in cabs, draining the pocket of the schoolmaster, who then follows in cabs. I study and get up abstruse No Thoroughfares in the course of the day. With Venetian mystery I seek those No Thoroughfares at night, glide into them by means of dark courts, tempt the schoolmaster to follow, turn suddenly, and catch him before he can retreat. Then we face one another, and I pass him as unaware of his existence, and he undergoes grinding torments. Similarly, I walk at a great pace down a short street, rapidly turn the corner, and, getting out of his view, as rapidly turn back. I catch him coming on post, again pass him as unaware of his existence, and again he undergoes grinding torments. Night after night his disappointment is acute, but hope springs eternal in the scholastic breast, and he follows me again to-morrow. Thus I enjoy the pleasures of the chase, and derive great benefit from the healthful exercise. When I do not enjoy the pleasures of the chase, for anything I know, he watches at the Temple Gate all night."

"This is an extraordinary story," observed Lightwood. "I don't like it."

"You are a little hipped, dear fellow," said Eugene; "you have been too sedentary. Come and enjoy the pleasures of the chase."

"Do you mean that you believe he is watching now?"

"I have not the slightest doubt he is."

"Have you seen him to-night?"

"I forgot to look for him when I was last out," returned Eugene with the calmest indifference; "but I dare say he

was there. Come! Be a British sportsman and enjoy the pleasures of the chase. It will do you good."

Lightwood hesitated; but, yielding to his curiosity, rose.

"Bravo!" cried Eugene, rising too. "Or, if Yoicks would be in better keeping, consider that I said Yoicks. Look to your feet, Mortimer, for we shall try your boots. When you are ready, I am—need I say with a Hey Ho Chivey, and likewise with a Hark Forward, Hark Forward, Tantivy?"

"Will nothing make you serious?" said Mortimer.

"I am always serious, but just now I am a little excited by the glorious fact that a southerly wind and a cloudy sky proclaim a hunting evening. Ready? So. We turn out the lamp and shut the door, and take the field."

As the two friends passed out of the Temple into the public street, Eugene demanded with a show of courteous patronage in which direction Mortimer would like the run to be? "There is a rather difficult country about Bethnal Green," said Eugene, "and we have not taken in that direction lately. What is your opinion of Bethnal Green?" Mortimer assented to Bethnal Green, and they turned eastward. "Now, when we come to St. Paul's church-yard," pursued Eugene, "we'll loiter artfully, and I'll show you the schoolmaster." But they both saw him, before they got there; alone, and stealing after them in the shadow of the houses, on the opposite side of the way.

"Get your wind," said Eugene, "for I am off directly. Does it occur to you that the boys of Merry England will begin to deteriorate in an educational light, if this lasts long? The schoolmaster can't attend to me and the boys too. Got your wind? I am off!"

At what a rate he went, to breathe the schoolmaster; and how he then lounged and loitered, to put his patience to another kind of wear; what preposterous ways he took with no other object on earth than to disappoint and punish him; and how he wore him out by every piece of ingenuity that his eccentric humor could devise; all this Lightwood noted, with a feeling of astonishment that so careless a man could be so wary, and that so idle a man could take so much trouble. At last, far on in the third hour of the pleasures of

the chase, when he had brought the poor dogging wretch round again into the City, he twisted Mortimer up a few dark entries, twisted him into a little square court, twisted him sharp round again, and they almost ran against Bradley Headstone.

“And you see, as I was saying, Mortimer,” remarked Eugene aloud with the utmost coolness, as though there were no one within hearing but themselves: “and you see, as I was saying—undergoing grinding torments.”

It was not too strong a phrase for the occasion. Looking like the hunted and not the hunter, baffled, worn, with the exhaustion of deferred hope and consuming hate and anger in his face, white-lipped, wild-eyed, draggle-haired, seamed with jealousy and anger, and torturing himself with the conviction that he showed it all and they exulted in it, he went by them in the dark, like a haggard head suspended in the air: so completely did the force of his expression cancel his figure.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BAFFLED, exasperated, and weary, Bradley Headstone lingered opposite the Temple gate when it closed on Wrayburn and Lightwood, debating with himself should he go home for that time or should he watch longer. Possessed in his jealousy by the fixed idea that Wrayburn was in the secret, if it were not altogether of his contriving, Bradley was as confident of getting the better of him at last by sullenly sticking to him, as he would have been—and often had been—of mastering any piece of study in the way of his vocation, by the like slow persistent process.

The suspicion crossed him as he rested in a door-way with his eyes upon the Temple gate, that perhaps she was even concealed in that set of Chambers. It would furnish another reason for Wrayburn's purposeless walks, and it might be. He thought of it and thought of it, until he resolved to steal up the stairs, if the gate-keeper would let him through, and listen. So the haggard head suspended in the air flitted across the road, like the spectre of one of the many heads erst hoisted upon neighboring Temple Bar, and stopped before the watchman.

The watchman looked at it, and asked : " Who for ? "

" Mr. Wrayburn."

" It's very late."

" He came back with Mr. Lightwood, I know, near upon two hours ago. But if he has gone to bed, I'll put a paper in his letter-box. I am expected."

The haggard head floated up the dark staircase, and softly descended nearer to the floor outside the outer door of the chambers.

" Not there, but she might have been." The head arose to its former height from the ground, floated down the staircase again, and passed on to the gate. A man was standing there, in parley with the watchman.

As Bradley passed out at the gate with an undecided foot, he heard it shut behind him, and heard the footstep of the man coming after him.

" ' Scuse me," said the man, who appeared to have been drinking, and rather stumbled at him than touched him, to attract his attention ; " but might you be acquainted with the T'other Governor ? "

" I don't know what you mean."

" Why, look here. There's two Governors, ain't there ? One and one, two—Lawyer Lightwood, my first finger, he's one, ain't he ? Well ; might you be acquainted with my middle finger, the T'other ? "

" I know quite as much of him as I want to know."

" Hooroar ! " cried the man. " Hooroar, T'other t'other Governor. Hooroar, T'otherest Governor ! I am of your way of thinkin."

" Don't make such a noise at this dead hour of the night. What are you talking about ? "

" Look here, T'otherest Governor," replied the man, becoming hoarsely confidential. " The T'other Governor he's always joked his jokes agin me, owing, as *I* believe, to my being a honest man as gets my living by the sweat of my brow. Which he ain't, and he don't."

Casting about for any way or help toward the discovery on which he was concentrated, Bradley Headstone replied : " You needn't take offense, I didn't mean to stop you. You were too loud in the open street ; that was all."

"T'otherest Governor," replied Mr. Riderhood, mollified and mysterious, "I know wot it is to be loud, and I know wot it is to be soft. Wishing that your 'ealth may be better than your looks, which your inside must be bad indeed if it's on the footing of your out."

Startled by the implication that his face revealed too much of his mind, Bradley made an effort to clear his brow.

"You call at the Temple late," he remarked, with a lumbering show of ease.

"Wish I may die," cried Mr. Riderhood, with a hoarse laugh, "if I warn't a-going to say the self-same words to you, T'otherest Governor!"

"It chanced so with me," said Bradley, looking disconcertedly about him.

"And it chanced so with me," said Riderhood. "But I don't mind telling you how. I'm a Deputy Lock-keeper up the river, and I was off duty yes'day, and I shall be on to-morrow, and I come to London to look arter my private affairs. My private affairs is to get appinted to the Lock as reg'lar keeper at fust hand, and to have the law of a busted B'low-Bridge steamer which drownded of me. I ain't a-going to be drownded and not paid for it! And when you mention the middle of the night, T'otherest Governor, throw your eye on this here bundle under my arm, and bear in mind that I'm a-walking back to my Lock, and that the Temple laid upon my line of road."

Bradley Headstone's face had changed during this latter recital, and he had observed the speaker with a more sustained attention.

"Do you know," said he, after a pause, during which they walked side by side, "that I believe I could tell you your name, if I tried?"

"Prove your opinion," was the answer, accompanied with a stop and a stare. "Try."

"Your name is Riderhood."

"I'm blest if it ain't. But I don't know your'n."

"That's quite another thing. I never supposed you did. Where is your lock?"

"Twenty mile and odd—call it five-and-twenty mile and odd, if you like—up stream," was the sullen reply.

"How is it called?"

"Plashwater Weir Mill Lock."

"Suppose I was to offer you five shillings; what then?"

"Why, then, I'd take it," said Mr. Riderhood.

The schoolmaster put his hand in his pocket, and produced two half-crowns, and placed them in Mr. Riderhood's palm.

"There's one thing about you, T'otherest Governor," said Riderhood, faring on again, "as looks well and goes fur. You're a ready money man. But what do you want for it?"

"I don't know that I want anything for it. You have no good-will towards this Wrayburn," said Bradley.

"No."

"Neither have I."

Riderhood nodded, and asked: "Is it for that?"

"It's as much for that as anything else. It's something to be agreed with, on a subject that occupies so much of one's thoughts. Let me ask you a question. I know something more than your name about you; I knew something about Gaffer Hexam. When did you last set eyes upon his daughter?"

"When did I last set eyes upon his daughter, T'otherest Governor?" repeated Mr. Riderhood, growing intentionally slower of comprehension as the other quickened in his speech.

"Yes.—Not to speak to her. To see her—anywhere?"

The Rogue had got the clue he wanted, though he held it with a clumsy hand. "I ain't set eyes upon her—never once—not since the day of Gaffer's death."

"You know her well, by sight?"

"I should think I did! No one better."

"And you know him as well?"

"Who's him?" asked Riderhood.

"Curse the name! Is it so agreeable to you that you want to hear it again?"

"Oh! *Him!*" said Riderhood, who had craftily worked the schoolmaster into this corner, that he might again take note of his face under its evil possession. "I'd know *him* among a thousand."

"Did you—" Bradley tried to ask it quietly: but do what

he might with his voice, he could not subdue his face ;—" did you ever see them together ? "

(The Rogue had got the clue in both hands now.)

" I see 'em together, T'otherest Governor, on the very day when Gaffer was towed ashore."

" Well ! was he insolent to her too ? " asked Bradley after a struggle. " Or did he make a show of being kind to her ? "

" He made a show of being most uncommon kind to her," said Riderhood. " By George ! now I think of it, pr'aps he went and took me down wrong, a purpose, on account o' being sweet upon her ! "

Bradley asked Riderhood point-blank if he knew where she was. Clearly, he did not know. He asked Riderhood if he would be willing, in case any intelligence of her or of Wrayburn as seeking her or associating with her, should fall in his way, to communicate it if it were paid for ? He would be very willing indeed. He was " agin 'em both," he said with an oath, and for why ? 'Cause they both stood betwixt him and his getting his living by the sweat of his brow.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

UP came the sun, streaming all over London, and in its glorious impartiality even condescending to make prismatic sparkles in the whiskers of Mr. Alfred Lammle as he sat at breakfast. In need of some brightening from without, was Mr. Alfred Lammle, for he had the air of being dull enough within, and looked grievously discontented.

Mrs. Alfred Lammle faced her lord.

" It seems to me," said she, " that you have had no money at all, ever since we have been married."

" What seems to you," said Mr. Lammle, " to have been the case, may possibly have been the case. It doesn't matter."

" And what is to happen next ? " asked Mrs. Lammle.

" Smash is to happen next. Sophronia."

" Well ? "

" Attend to me, if you please. You know our league and covenant. We are to work together for our joint interest,

and you are as knowing a hand as I am. We shouldn't be together, if you were not. We are hemmed into a corner. What shall we do?"

"Have you no scheme on foot that will bring in anything?"

Mr. Lammle plunged into his whiskers for reflection, and came out hopeless: "No; as adventurers we are obliged to play rash games for chances of high winnings, and there has been a run of luck against us."

"Have you nothing—"

"We, Sophronia. We, we, we."

"Have we nothing to sell?"

"Deuce a bit. I have given a Jew a bill of sale on this furniture, and he could take it to-morrow, to-day, now. He would have taken it before now, I believe, but for Fledgeby."

"What has Fledgeby to do with him?"

"Knew him. Cautioned me against him before I got into his claws. Couldn't persuade him then, in behalf of somebody else."

"Do you mean that Fledgeby has at all softened him towards you?"

"Us, Sophronia. Us, us, us."

"Towards us?"

"I mean that the Jew has not yet done what he might have done, and that Fledgeby takes the credit of having got him to hold his hand."

"Do you believe Fledgeby?"

"Sophronia, I never believe anybody. I never have, my dear, since I believed you. But it looks like it. If we could have packed the brute off with Georgiana;—but however, that's spilled milk."

"If we could borrow money, Alfred—"

"Beg money, borrow money, or steal money. It would be all one to us, Sophronia," her husband struck in.

"It is natural, Alfred," she said, looking up with some timidity into his face, "to think in such an emergency of the richest people we know, and the simplest."

"Just so, Sophronia."

"The Boffins."

"Just so, Sophronia."

"Is there nothing to be done with them?"

"What is there to be done with them, Sophronia?"

She cast about in her thoughts again, and he kept his eye upon her as before.

"Of course I have repeatedly thought of the Boffins, Sophronia," he resumed, after a fruitless silence; "but I have seen my way to nothing. They are well guarded. That infernal Secretary stands between them and—people of merit."

"If he could be got rid of?" she said, brightening a little, after more casting about.

"Take time, Sophronia," observed her watchful husband, in a patronizing manner.

"Leave it to me. Spare me the little carriage for to-day, and for to-morrow (if I don't succeed to-day)."

CHAPTER XL.

HAVING assisted at a few more expositions of the lives of Misers, Mr. Venus became almost indispensable to the evenings at the Bower.

The adverse destinies ordained that one evening Mr. Wegg's laboring bark became beset by polysyllables, and embarrassed among a perfect archipelago of hard words. It being necessary to take soundings every minute, and to feel the way with the greatest caution, Mr. Wegg's attention was fully employed. Advantage was taken of this dilemma by Mr. Venus, to pass a scrap of paper into Mr. Boffin's hand, and lay his finger on his own lip.

When Mr. Boffin got home at night he found that the paper contained Mr. Venus's card and these words: "Should be glad to be honored with a call respecting business of your own, about dusk on any early evening."

The very next evening saw Mr. Boffin peeping in at the preserved frogs in Mr. Venus's shop-window, and saw Mr. Venus espying Mr. Boffin with the readiness of one on the alert, and beckoning that gentleman into his interior.

"You see, Mr. Venus, I've lost no time. Here I am."

"Here you are, sir," assented Mr. Venus.

"I don't like secrecy," pursued Mr. Boffin "—at least not

in a general way I don't—but I dare say you'll show me good reason for being secret so far."

"I think I shall, sir," returned Venus.

"Good," said Mr. Boffin. "You don't expect Wegg, I take it for granted?"

"No, sir. Mr. Boffin, if I confess to you that I fell into a proposal of which you were the subject, and of which you oughtn't to have been the subject, you will allow me to mention, and will please take into favorable consideration, that I was in a crushed state of mind at the time. Not that I was ever hearty in it, sir," the penitent anatomist went on, "or that I ever viewed myself with anything but reproach, for having turned out of the paths of science into the paths of—" he was going to say "villainy," but, unwilling to press too hard upon himself, substituted with great emphasis—"Weggery."

Placid and whimsical of look as ever, Mr. Boffin answered: "Quite so, Venus."

"And now, sir," said Venus, "having prepared your mind in the rough, I will articulate the details." With which brief professional exordium, he entered on the history of the friendly move, and truly recounted it.

When Venus passed to Wegg's discovery, and from that to their having both seen Mr. Boffin dig up the Dutch bottle, that gentleman changed color, changed his attitude, became extremely restless, and ended (when Venus ended) by being in a state of manifest anxiety, trepidation, and confusion.

"Now, sir," said Venus, finishing off; "you best know what was in that Dutch bottle, and why you dug it up, and took it away. I don't pretend to know anything more about it than I saw. All I know is this: As the best amends I can make you for having ever gone into it, I make known to you, as a warning, what Wegg has found out. My opinion is, that Wegg is not to be silenced at a modest price, and I build that opinion on his beginning to dispose of your property the moment he knew his power. Whether it's worth your while to silence him at any price, you will decide for yourself, and take your measures accordingly. As far as I am concerned, I have no price. If I am ever called upon for the truth, I tell it, but I want to do no more than I have now done and ended."

"Thank'ee, Venus!" said Mr. Boffin with a hearty grip of his hand; "thank'ee, Venus, thank'ee, Venus!" And then walked up and down the little shop in great agitation. "But look here, Venus," he by-and-by resumed, nervously sitting down again: "if I have to buy Wegg up, I shan't buy him any cheaper for your being out of it. Instead of his having half the money—it was to have been half, I suppose? Share and share alike?"

"It was to have been half, sir," answered Venus.

"Instead of that, he'll now have all. I shall pay the same, if not more. For you tell me he's an unconscionable dog, a ravenous rascal."

"He is," said Venus.

"Don't you think, Venus," insinuated Mr. Boffin, after looking at the fire for a while—"don't you feel as if—you might like to pretend to be in it till Wegg was bought up, and then ease your mind by handing over to me what you had made believe to pocket?"

"No I don't, sir," returned Venus, very positively.

"Not to make amends?" insinuated Mr. Boffin.

"No, sir. It seems to me, after maturely thinking it over, that the best amends for having got out of the square is to get back into the square."

"Humph! When you say the square, you mean—"

"I mean," said Venus, stoutly and shortly, "the right."

"It appears to me," said Mr. Boffin, grumbling over the fire in an injured manner, "that the right is with me, if it's anywhere. And how am I to live, if I'm to be going buying fellows up out of the little that I've got? And how am I to set about it? When am I to get my money ready? When am I to make a bid? You haven't told me when he threatens to drop down upon me."

Venus explained under what conditions, and with what views, the dropping down upon Mr. Boffin was held over until the Mounds should be cleared away. Mr. Boffin listened attentively, "I suppose," said he, with a gleam of hope, "there's no doubt about the genuineness and date of this confounded will?"

"None whatever," said Mr. Venus.

"Where might it be deposited at present?" asked Mr. Boffin, in a wheedling tone.

"It's in my possession, sir."

"Is it?" he cried, with great eagerness. "Now, for any liberal sum of money that could be agreed upon, Venus, would you put it in the fire?"

"No sir, I wouldn't," said Mr. Venus.

"Nor pass it over to me?"

"That would be the same thing. No, sir."

The Golden Dustman seemed about to pursue these questions, when a stumping noise was heard outside, coming towards the door. "Hush! here's Wegg!" said Venus. "Get behind the young alligator in the corner, Mr. Boffin, and judge him for yourself. Are you right, sir?"

Mr. Boffin had but whispered an affirmative response, when Wegg came stumping in. "Partner," said that gentleman in a sprightly manner, "how's yourself?"

"Tolerable," said Mr. Venus. "Not much to boast of."

"In-deed!" said Wegg: "sorry, partner, that you're not picking up faster, but your soul's too large for your body, sir; that's where it is. And how's our stock in trade, partner? Safe bind, safe find, partner? Is that about it?"

"Do you wish to see it?" asked Venus.

"If you please, partner," said Wegg, rubbing his hands. "I wish to see it jintly with yourself. Or, in similar words to some that was set to music some time back:

I wish you to see it with your eyes
And I will pledge with mine."

Turning his back and turning a key, Mr. Venus produced the document, holding on by his usual corner. Mr. Wegg, holding on by the opposite corner, sat down on the seat so lately vacated by Mr. Boffin, and looked it over. "All right sir," he slowly and unwillingly admitted, in his reluctance to loose his hold, "all right!" And greedily watched his partner as he turned his back again, and turned his key again.

"There's nothing new, I suppose!" said Venus, resuming his low chair behind the counter.

"Yes there is, sir," replied Wegg; "there was something new this morning. That foxy old grasper and griper—"

"Mr. Boffin?" inquired Venus, with a glance towards the alligator's yard or two of smile.

"Mister be blowed!" cried Wegg, yielding to his honest indignation. "Boffin. Dusty Boffin. That foxy old grunter and grinder, sir, turns into the yard this morning, to meddle with our property, a menial tool of his own, a young man by the name of Sloppy. Ecod, when I say to him, 'What do you want here, young man? This is a private yard,' he pulls out a paper from Boffin's other blackguard, the one I was passed over for. 'This is to authorize Sloppy to overlook the carting and to watch the work.' That's pretty strong, I think, Mr. Venus?"

"Remember he doesn't know yet of our claim on the property," suggested Venus.

"Then he must have a hint of it," said Wegg, "and a strong one that'll jog his terrors a bit. Give him an inch, and he'll take an ell. Let him alone this time, and what'll he do with our property next? I tell you what, Mr. Venus, it comes to this; I must be overbearing with Boffin, or I shall fly into several pieces. I can't contain myself when I look at him. Every time I see him putting his hand in his pocket, I see him putting it into my pocket. Every time I hear him jingling his money, I hear him taking liberties with my money. Flesh and blood can't bear it. No," said Mr. Wegg, greatly exasperated, "and I'll go further. A wooden leg can't bear it!"

"But, Mr. Wegg," urged Venus, "it was your own idea that he should not be exploded upon, till the Mounds were carted away."

"But it was likewise my idea, Mr. Venus," retorted Wegg, "that if he came sneaking and sniffing about the property, he should be threatened, given to understand that he has no right to it, and be made our slave. Wasn't that my idea, Mr. Venus?"

"It certainly was, Mr. Wegg."

"It certainly was, as you say, partner," assented Wegg, put into a better humor by the ready admission. "Very well. I consider his planting one of his menial tools in the yard, an act of sneaking and sniffing. And his nose shall be put to the grindstone for it."

"It was not your fault, Mr. Wegg, I must admit," said Venus. "that he got off with the Dutch bottle that night."

"As you handsomely say again, partner! No, it was not my fault. I'd have had that bottle out of him. Was it to be borne that he should come, like a thief in the dark, digging among stuff that was far more ours than his (seeing that we could deprive him of every grain of it, if he didn't buy us at our own figure), and carrying off treasure from its bowels? No, it was not to be borne. And, for that, too, his nose shall be put to the grindstone."

"How do you propose to do it, Mr. Wegg?"

"To put his nose to the grindstone? I propose," returned that estimable man, "to insult him openly. And, if looking into this eye of mine, he dares to offer a word in answer, to retort upon him before he can take his breath, 'Add another word to that, you dusty old dog, and you're a beggar.'"

"Suppose he says nothing, Mr. Wegg?"

"Then," replied Wegg, "we shall have come to an understanding with very little trouble, and I'll break him and drive him, Mr. Venus. I'll put him in harness, and I'll bear him up tight, and I'll break him and drive him. The harder the old Dust is driven, sir, the higher he'll pay. And I mean to be paid high, Mr. Venus, I promise you."

"You speak quite revengefully, Mr. Wegg."

"Revengefully, sir? Mr. Venus, perhaps I'm duller and savager than usual. Perhaps I *have* allowed myself to brood too much. Begone, dull Care! 'Tis gone, sir. I've looked in upon you, and empire resumes her sway. For, as the song says—subject to your correction, sir—

'When the heart of a man is depressed with cares,
The mist is dispelled if Venus appears.
Like the notes of a fiddle, you sweetly, sir, sweetly,
Raises our spirits and charms our ears,'

Good-night, sir."

"That's a treacherous fellow," said Mr. Boffin, dusting his arms and legs as he came forth, the alligator having been but musty company. "That's a dreadful fellow."

"The alligator, sir?" said Venus.

"No, Venus, no. The Serpent."

"You'll have the goodness to notice, Mr. Boffin," remarked Venus, "that I said nothing to him about my going out of

the affair altogether, because I didn't wish to take you any-ways by surprise. But I can't be too soon out of it for my satisfaction, Mr. Boffin, and I now put it to you when it will suit your views for me to retire?"

"Thank'ee, Venus, thank'ee, Venus; but I don't know what to say," returned Mr. Boffin, "I don't know what to do. He'll drop down on me, anyway. He seems fully determined to drop down; don't he?"

Mr. Venus opined that such was clearly his intention.

"You might be a sort of protection for me, if you remained to it," said Mr. Boffin; "you might stand betwixt him and me, and take the edge off him. Don't you feel as if you could make a show of remaining in it, Venus, till I had time to turn myself round?"

Venus naturally inquired how long Mr. Boffin thought it might take him to turn himself round?

"I am sure I don't know," was the answer, given quite at a loss. "Everything is so at sixes and sevens. When you do go out of it, how do you mean to go?"

Venus replied that as Wegg had found the document and handed it to him, it was his intention to hand it back to Wegg, with the declaration that he himself would have nothing to say to it, or do with it, and that Wegg must act as he chose, and take the consequences.

"How long could you be persuaded to keep up the appearance of remaining in it?" asked Mr. Boffin, retiring on his other idea. "Could you be got to do so, till the Mounds are gone?"

No. That would protract the mental uneasiness of Mr. Venus too long, he said.

"Not if I was to show you reason now?" demanded Mr. Boffin; "not if I was to show you good and sufficient reason?"

If by good and sufficient reason Mr. Boffin meant honest and unimpeachable reason, that might weigh with Mr. Venus against his personal wishes and convenience.

"Come and see me, Venus," said Mr. Boffin, "at my house."

"Is the reason there, sir?" asked Mr. Venus, with an incredulous smile and blink.

"It may be, or may not be," said Mr. Boffin, "just as you view it. But in the mean time don't go out of the matter. Look here. Do this. Give me your word that you won't take any steps with Wegg, without my knowledge, just as I have given you my word that I won't without yours."

"Done, Mr. Boffin," said Venus.

"Thank'ee, Venus, thank'ee, Venus! Done!"

"When shall I come to see you, Mr. Boffin?"

"When you like. The sooner the better. I must be going now. Good-night, Venus."

"Good-night, sir."

Mr. Boffin was within a few streets of his own house, when a little private carriage, coming in the contrary direction, passed him, turned round, and passed him again. When he came to the corner of his own street, there it stood again.

There was a lady's face at the window as he came up with this carriage, and he was passing it when the lady softly called to him by his name.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am?" said Mr. Boffin.

"It is Mrs. Lammle," said the lady.

Mr. Boffin went up to the window, and hoped Mrs. Lammle was well.

"Not very well, dear Mr. Boffin; I have fluttered myself by being—perhaps foolishly—uneasy and anxious. I have been waiting for you for some time. Can I speak to you?"

Mr. Boffin proposed that Mrs. Lammle should drive on to his house, a few hundred yards further.

"I would rather not, Mr. Boffin, unless you particularly wish it. I feel the difficulty and delicacy of the matter so much that I would rather avoid speaking to you at your own home. Would you mind coming into the carriage?"

Mr. Boffin answered, "Not at all," and took his seat at Mrs. Lammle's side.

"Drive slowly anywhere," Mrs. Lammle called to her coachman, "and don't let the carriage rattle."

"It *must* be more dropping down, I think," said Mr. Boffin to himself. "What next?"

CHAPTER XLI.

THE breakfast table at Mr. Boffin's was usually a very pleasant one, and was always presided over by Bella. As though he began each new day in his healthy natural character, and some waking hours were necessary to his relapse into the corrupting influences of his wealth, the face and the demeanor of the Golden Dustman were generally unclouded at that meal.

But, one morning long to be remembered, it was black midnight with the Golden Dustman when he first appeared. His altered character had never been so grossly marked. His bearing towards his Secretary was so charged with insolent distrust and arrogance, that the latter rose and left the table before breakfast was half done. The look he directed at the Secretary's retiring figure was so cunningly malignant, that Bella would have sat astounded and indignant, even though he had not gone the length of secretly threatening Rokesmith with his clenched fist as he closed the door. This unlucky morning, of all mornings in the year, was the morning next after Mr. Boffin's interview with Mrs. Lamble in her little carriage.

It was far on in the afternoon when, Bella being in her own room, a servant brought her a message from Mr. Boffin begging her to come to his.

Mrs. Boffin was there, seated on a sofa, and Mr. Boffin was jogging up and down. On seeing Bella he stopped, beckoned her to him, and drew her arm through his. "Don't be alarmed, my dear," he said, gently; "I am not angry with you. Why, you actually tremble! Don't be alarmed, Bella my dear. I'll see you righted."

"See me righted, sir?"

"Ay, ay!" said Mr. Boffin. "See you righted. Send Mr. Rokesmith here, you sir."

Bella would have been lost in perplexity if there had been pause enough; but the servant found Mr. Rokesmith near at hand, and he almost immediately presented himself.

"Shut the door, sir!" said Mr. Boffin. "I have got something to say to you which I fancy you will not be pleased to hear."

"I am sorry to reply, Mr. Boffin," returned the Secretary, as, having closed the door, he turned and faced him, "that it has become no novelty to me to hear from your lips what I would rather not hear."

"Now, sir," said Mr. Boffin, "look at this young lady on my arm. How dare you, sir, tamper, unknown to me, with this young lady? How dare you come out of your station, and your place in my house, to pester this young lady with your impudent addresses?"

"I must decline to answer questions," said the Secretary, "that are so offensively asked."

"You decline to answer?" retorted Mr. Boffin. "You decline to answer, do you? Then I'll tell you what it is, Rokesmith; I'll answer for you. There are two sides to this matter, and I'll take 'em separately. The first side is, sheer Insolence. That's the first side."

The Secretary smiled with some bitterness, as though he would have said, "So I see and hear."

"It was sheer Insolence in you, I tell you," said Mr. Boffin, "even to think of this young lady. This young lady was far above *you*. This young lady was no match for *you*. This young lady was lying in wait (as she was qualified to do) for money, and you had no money."

Bella hung her head and seemed to shrink a little from Mr. Boffin's protecting arm.

"What are you, I should like to know," pursued Mr. Boffin, "that you were to have the audacity to follow up this young lady? This young lady was looking about the market for a good bid; she wasn't in it to be snapped up by fellows that had no money to lay out; nothing to buy with."

"Oh, Mr. Boffin! Mrs. Boffin, pray say something for me!" murmured Bella, disengaging her arm, and covering her face with her hands.

"Old lady," said Mr. Boffin, anticipating his wife, "you hold your tongue. Bella, my dear, don't you let yourself be put out. I'll right you."

"But you don't, you don't right me!" exclaimed Bella, with great emphasis. "You wrong me, wrong me!"

"Don't you be put out, my dear," complacently retorted Mr. Boffin. "I'll bring this young man to book. Now, you

Rokesmith! You can't decline to hear, you know, as well as to answer. You hear me tell you that the first side of your conduct was Insolence—Insolence and Presumption. Answer me one thing, if you can. Didn't this young lady tell you so herself?"

"Did I, Mr. Rokesmith?" asked Bella with her face still covered. "O say, Mr. Rokesmith! Did I?"

"Don't be distressed, Miss Wilfer; it matters very little now."

"Ah! You can't deny it, though!" said Mr. Boffin, with a knowing shake of his head.

"But I have asked him to forgive me since," cried Bella; "and I would ask him to forgive me now again, upon my knees, if it would spare him!"

Here Mrs. Boffin broke out a-crying.

"Old lady," said Mr. Boffin, "stop that noise! Tender-hearted in you, Miss Bella; but I mean to have it out right through with this young man, having got him into a corner. Now, you Rokesmith. I tell you that's one side of your conduct—Insolence and Presumption. Now I'm a-coming to the other, which is much worse. This was a speculation of yours."

"I indignantly deny it."

"It's of no use your denying it; it doesn't signify a bit whether you deny it or not; I've got a head upon my shoulders, and it ain't a baby's. I'm a-going to unfold your plan, before this young lady; I'm a-going to show this young lady the second view of you; and nothing you can say will stave it off. (Now, attend here, Bella, my dear.) Rokesmith, you're a needy chap. You're a chap that I pick up in the street. Are you, or ain't you?"

"Go on, Mr. Boffin; don't appeal to me."

"Not appeal to *you*," retorted Mr. Boffin as if he hadn't done so. "No, I should hope not! Appealing to *you*, would be rather a rum course. As I was saying, you're a needy chap that I pick up in the street. You come and ask me in the street to take you for a Secretary, and I take you. Very good."

"Very bad," murmured the Secretary.

"What do you say?" asked Mr. Boffin.

He returned no answer. Mr. Boffin, after eyeing him with a comical look of discomfited curiosity, was fain to begin afresh.

"This Rokesmith is a needy young man that I take for my Secretary out of the open street. This Rokesmith gets acquainted with my affairs, and gets to know that I mean to settle a sum of money on this young lady. 'Oho!' says this Rokesmith!" here Mr. Boffin clapped a finger against his nose, and tapped it several times with a sneaking air, as embodying Rokesmith confidentially confabulating with his own nose; "'This will be a good haul: I'll go in for this!' And so this Rokesmith, greedy and hungering, begins a-creeping on his hands and knees towards the money. Not so bad a speculation either: for if this young lady had had less spirit, or had had less sense, through being at all in the romantic line, by George, he might have worked it out and made it pay! But fortunately she was too many for him, and a pretty figure he cuts now he is exposed. There he stands!" said Mr. Boffin, addressing Rokesmith himself with ridiculous inconsistency. "Look at him!"

"Your unfortunate suspicions, Mr. Boffin—" began the Secretary.

"Precious unfortunate for *you*, I can tell you," said Mr. Boffin.

"—are not to be combated by any one, and I address myself to no such hopeless task. But I will say a word upon the truth."

"Yah! Much you care about the truth," said Mr. Boffin.

"Noddy! My dear love!" expostulated his wife.

"Old lady," returned Mr. Boffin, "you keep still. I say to this Rokesmith here, much he cares about the truth. I tell him again, much he cares about the truth."

"Our connection being at an end," said the Secretary, "it can be of very little moment to me what you say."

"Oh! You are knowing enough," retorted Mr. Boffin, with a sly look, "to have found out that our connection's at an end, eh? But you can't get beforehand with me. Look at this in my hand. This is your pay, on your discharge. You can only follow suit. You can't deprive me of the lead. Let's have no pretending that you discharge yourself. I discharge you."

"So that I go," remarked the Secretary, waving the point aside with his hand, "it is all one to me."

"Is it?" said Mr. Boffin. "But it's two to me, let me tell you. Allowing a fellow that's found out to discharge himself, is one thing; discharging him for insolence and presumption, and likewise for designs upon his master's money, is another. One and one's two; not one. (Old lady, don't you cut in. You keep still)."

"Have you said all you wish to say to me?" demanded the Secretary.

"I don't know whether I have or not," answered Mr. Boffin. "It depends."

"Perhaps you will consider whether there are any other strong expressions that you would like to bestow upon me?"

"I'll consider that," said Mr. Boffin, obstinately, "at my convenience, and not at yours. You want the last word. It may not be suitable to let you have it."

"Noddy! My dear, dear Noddy! You sound so hard!" cried poor Mrs. Boffin, not to be quite repressed.

"Old lady," said her husband, but without harshness, "if you cut in when requested not, I'll get a pillow and carry you out of the room upon it. What do you want to say, you Rokesmith?"

"To you, Mr. Boffin, nothing. But to Miss Wilfer and to your good kind wife, a word."

"Out with it then," replied Mr. Boffin, "and cut it short, for we've had enough of you."

"I have borne," said the Secretary, in a low voice, "with my false position here, that I might not be separated from Miss Wilfer. To be near her, has been a recompense to me from day to day, even for the undeserved treatment I have had here, and for the degraded aspect in which she has often seen me. Since Miss Wilfer rejected me, I have never again urged my suit, to the best of my belief, with a spoken syllable or a look. But I have never changed in my devotion to her, except—if she will forgive my saying so—that it is deeper than it was, and better founded."

"Now, mark this chap's saying Miss Wilfer, when he means £ s. d.!" cried Mr. Boffin, with a cunning wink. "Now, mark this chap's making Miss Wilfer stand for Pounds, Shillings, and Pence!"

"My feeling for Miss Wilfer," pursued the Secretary, without deigning to notice him, "is not one to be ashamed of. I avow it. I love her. Let me go where I may when I presently leave this house, I shall go into a blank life, leaving her."

"Leaving £ s. d. behind me," said Mr. Boffin, by way of commentary, with another wink.

"That I am incapable," the Secretary went on, still without heeding him, "of a mercenary project, or a mercenary thought, in connection with Miss Wilfer, is nothing meritorious in me, because any prize that I could put before my fancy would sink into insignificance beside her. If the greatest wealth or the highest rank were hers, it would only be important in my sight as removing her still farther from me, and making me more hopeless, if that could be. Say," remarked the Secretary, looking full at his late master, "say that with a word she could strip Mr. Boffin of his fortune and take possession of it, she would be of no greater worth in my eyes than she is."

"What do you think by this time, old lady," asked Mr. Boffin, turning to his wife in a bantering tone, "about this Rokesmith here, and his caring for the truth? You needn't say what you think, my dear, because I don't want you to cut in, but you can think it all the same. As to taking possession of my property, I warrant you he wouldn't do that himself if he could."

"No," returned the Secretary, with another full look.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Boffin. "There's nothing like a good 'un while you *are* about it."

"I have been for a moment," said the Secretary, turning from him and falling into his former manner, "diverted from the little I have to say. My interest in Miss Wilfer began when I first saw her: even began when I had only heard of her. It was, in fact, the cause of my throwing myself in Mr. Boffin's way, and entering his service. Miss Wilfer has never known this until now. I mention it now, only as a corroboration (though I hope it may be needless) of my being free from the sordid design attributed to me."

"Now, this is a very artful dog," said Mr. Boffin, with a deep look; "this is a longer-headed schemer than I thought

him. See how patiently and methodically he goes to work. He gets to know about me and my property, and about this young lady, and her share in poor young John's story, and he puts this and that together, and he says to himself, 'I'll get in with Boffin, and I'll get in with this young lady, and I'll work 'em both at the same time, and I'll bring my pigs to market somewhere.' I hear him say it, bless you! Why, I look at him now, and I see him say it!"

Mr. Boffin pointed at the culprit, as it were in the act, and hugged himself in his great penetration.

"But luckily he hadn't to deal with the people he supposed, Bella, my dear!" said Mr. Boffin. "No! Luckily he had to deal with you, and with me, and with Daniel and Miss Dancer, and with Elwes, and with Vulture Hopkins, and with Blewbury Jones and all the rest of us, one down t'other come on. And he's beat; that's what he is; regularly beat. He thought to squeeze money out of us, and he has done for himself instead, Bella my dear!"

Bella my dear made no response, gave no sign of acquiescence. When she had first covered her face she had sunk upon a chair with her hands resting on the back of it, and had never moved since.

"There's your pay, Mr. Rokesmith," said the Golden Dustman, jerking the folded scrap of paper he had in his hand, towards his late Secretary. "I dare say you can stoop to pick it up, after what you have stooped to here."

"I have stooped to nothing but this," Rokesmith answered as he took it from the ground; "and this is mine, for I have earned it by the hardest of hard labor."

"You're a pretty quick packer, I hope," said Mr. Boffin; "because the sooner you are gone, bag and baggage, the better for all parties."

"You need have no fear of my lingering."

"There's just one thing though," said Mr. Boffin, "that I should like to ask you before we come to a good riddance."

"Ask me anything you wish to ask," returned Rokesmith, "but use the expedition that you recommend."

"You pretend to have a mighty admiration for this young lady?" said Mr. Boffin, laying his hand protectingly on Bella's head without looking down at her.

"I do not pretend."

"Oh! Well. You *have* a mighty admiration for this young lady—since you are so particular?"

"Yes."

"How do you reconcile that with this young lady's being a weak-spirited, improvident idiot, not knowing what was due to herself, flinging up her money to the church-weather-cocks, and racing off at a splitting pace for the workhouse?"

"I don't understand you."

"Don't you? Or won't you? What else could you have made this young lady out to be, if she had listened to such addresses as yours?"

"What else, if I had been so happy as to win her affections and possess her heart?"

"Win her affections," retorted Mr. Boffin, with ineffable contempt, "and possess her heart! Mew says the cat, Quack-quack says the duck, Bow-wow-wow says the dog! Win her affections and possess her heart! Mew, Quack-quack, Bow-wow!"

John Rokesmith stared at him in his outburst, as if with some faint idea that he had gone mad.

"What is due to this young lady," said Mr. Boffin, "is Money, and this young lady right well knows it."

"You slander the young lady."

"*You* slander the young lady; you with your affections and hearts and trumpery," returned Mr. Boffin. "It's of a piece with the rest of your behavior. I heard of these doings of yours only last night, or you should have heard of 'em from me sooner, take your oath of it. I heard of 'em from a lady with as good a head-piece as the best," (a silly, boastful conversation with Mrs. Lammle flashed into poor Bella's mind) "and she knows this young lady, and I know this young lady, and we all three know that it's Money she makes a stand for—money—money, money, and that you and your affections and hearts are a Lie, sir!"

"Mrs Boffin," said Rokesmith, quietly turning to her, "for your delicate and unvarying kindness I thank you with the warmest gratitude. Good-bye! Miss Wilfer, good-bye!"

"And now, my dear," said Mr. Boffin, laying his hand on

Bella's head again, "you may begin to make yourself quite comfortable, and I hope you feel that you've been righted."

But Bella was so far from appearing to feel it, that she shrank from his hand and from the chair, and, starting up in an incoherent passion of tears, and stretching out her arms, cried, "O Mr. Rokesmith, before you go, if you could but make me poor again! O! Make me poor again, Somebody, I beg and pray, or my heart will break if this goes on! Pa, dear, make me poor again and take me home! I was bad enough there, but I have been so much worse here. Don't give me money, Mr. Boffin, I won't have money. Keep it away from me, and only let me speak to good little Pa, and lay my head upon his shoulder, and tell him all my griefs. Nobody else can understand me, nobody else can comfort me, nobody else knows how unworthy I am, and yet can love me like a little child. I am better with Pa than any one—more innocent, more sorry, more glad!" So, crying out in a wild way that she could not bear this, Bella drooped her head on Mrs. Boffin's ready breast.

John Rokesmith from his place in the room, and Mr. Boffin from his, looked on at her in silence until she was silent herself. Then Mr. Boffin observed in a soothing and comfortable tone, "There, my dear, there; you are righted now, and it's *all* right. I don't wonder, I'm sure, at your being a little flurried by having a scene with this fellow, but it's all over, my dear, and you're righted, and it's—and it's *all* right!" Which Mr. Boffin repeated with a highly satisfied air of completeness and finality.

"I hate you!" cried Bella, turning suddenly upon him, with a stamp of her little foot—"at least, I can't hate you, but I don't like you!"

"HUL—LO!" exclaimed Mr. Boffin in an amazed undertone.

"You're a scolding, unjust, abusive, aggravating, bad old creature!" cried Bella. "I am angry with my ungrateful self for calling you names; but you are, you are; you know you are!"

Mr. Boffin stared here, and stared there, as misdoubting that he must be in some sort of fit.

"I have heard you with shame," said Bella. "With

shame for myself, and with shame for you. You ought to be above the base tale-bearing of a time-serving woman; but you are above nothing now."

Mr. Boffin seeming to become convinced that this was a fit, rolled his eyes and loosened his neckcloth.

"When I came here, I respected you and honored you, and I soon loved you," cried Bella, "and now I can't bear the sight of you. At least, I don't know that I ought to go so far as that—only you're a—you're a Monster!" Having shot this bolt out with a great expenditure of force, Bella hysterically laughed and cried together.

"The best wish I can wish you is," said Bella, returning to the charge, "that you had not one single farthing in the world. If any true friend and well-wisher could make you a bankrupt, you would be a Duck; but as a man of property you are a Demon!"

After despatching this second bolt with a still greater expenditure of force, Bella laughed and cried still more.

"Mr. Rokesmith, pray stay one moment. Pray hear one word from me before you go! I am deeply sorry for the reproaches you have borne on my account. Out of the depths of my heart I earnestly and truly beg your pardon."

As she stepped towards him, he met her. As she gave him her hand, he put it to his lips, and said, "God bless you!" No laughing was mixed with Bella's crying then; her tears were pure and fervent.

"There is not an ungenerous word that I have heard addressed to you—heard with scorn and indignation, Mr. Rokesmith—but it has wounded me far more than you, for I have deserved it, and you never have. Mr. Rokesmith, it is to me you owe this perverted account of what passed between us that night. I parted with the secret, even while I was angry with myself for doing so. It was very bad in me, but indeed it was not wicked. I did it in a moment of conceit and folly. As I am punished for it severely, try to forgive it!"

"I do, with all my soul."

"Thank you. O thank you! Don't part from me till I have said one other word, to do you justice. The only fault you can be truly charged with, in having spoken to me as

you did that night—with how much delicacy and how much forbearance no one but I can know or be grateful to you for—is, that you laid yourself open to be slighted by a worldly shallow girl whose head was turned, and who was quite unable to rise to the worth of what you offered her. Mr. Roke-smith, that girl has often seen herself in a pitiful and poor light since, but never in so pitiful and poor a light as now, when the mean tone in which she answered you—sordid and vain girl that she was—has been echoed in her ears by Mr. Boffin."

He once more put her hand to his lips, and then relinquished it, and left the room. "He is gone," sobbed Bella, indignantly, despairingly, in fifty ways at once, with her arms round Mrs. Boffin's neck. "He has been most shamefully abused, and most unjustly and most basely driven away, and I am the cause of it!"

No word, good or bad, did Mrs. Boffin say; but she tenderly took care of Bella, and glanced at her husband as if for orders. Mr. Boffin, without imparting any, took his seat on a chair over against them, and there sat leaning forward, with a fixed countenance, his legs apart, a hand on each knee, and his elbows squared, until Bella should dry her eyes and raise her head, which in the fullness of time she did.

"I must go home," said Bella. "I am very grateful to you for all you have done for me, but I can't stay here."

"My darling girl!" remonstrated Mrs. Boffin.

"No, I can't stay here," said Bella; "I can't indeed.—Ugh! you vicious old thing!" (This to Mr. Boffin.)

"Don't be rash, my love," urged Mrs. Boffin. "Think well of what you do."

"Yes, you had better think well," said Mr. Boffin.

"I shall never more think well of *you*," cried Bella, cutting him short, with intense defiance in her expressive little eyebrows, and championship of the late Secretary in every dimple. "No. Never again! Your money has changed you to marble. You are a hard-hearted Miser. You are worse than Dancer, worse than Hopkins, worse than Blackberry Jones, worse than any of the wretches. And more!" proceeded Bella, breaking into tears again, "you were wholly undeserving of the Gentleman you have lost."

"Why, you don't mean to say, Miss Bella," the Golden Dustman slowly remonstrated, "that you set up Rokesmith against me?"

"I do!" said Bella. "He is worth a Million of you. I would rather he thought well of me, though he swept the street for bread, than that you did, though you splashed the mud upon him from the wheels of a chariot of pure gold.—There!"

"Well I'm sure!" cried Mr. Boffin, staring.

"And for a long time past, when you have thought you set yourself above him, I have only seen you under his feet," said Bella—"There! And throughout I saw in him the master, and I saw in you the man—There! And when you used him shamefully, I took his part and loved him—There! I boast of it!"

After which strong avowal Bella underwent reaction, and cried to any extent, with her face on the back of her chair.

"Now, look here," said Mr. Boffin. "Give me your attention, Bella. I am not angry."

"I *am*!" said Bella.

"I say," resumed the Golden Dustman, "I am not angry, and I mean kindly to you, and I want to overlook this. So you'll stay where you are, and we'll agree to say no more about it."

"No, I can't stay here," cried Bella, rising hurriedly again; "I can't think of staying here. I must go home for good."

"Now, don't be silly," Mr. Boffin reasoned. "Don't do what you're sure to be sorry for."

"I shall never be sorry for it," said Bella; "and I should always be sorry, and should every minute of my life despise myself, if I remained here after what has happened."

"At least, Bella," argued Mr. Boffin, "let there be no mistake about it. Look before you leap, you know. Stay where you are, and all's well, and all's as it was to be. Go away, and you can never come back."

"I know that I can never come back, and that's what I mean," said Bella.

"You mustn't expect," Mr. Boffin pursued, "that I'm a-going to settle money on you, if you leave us like this, be-

cause I am not. No, Bella! Not one brass farthing."

"Expect!" said Bella, haughtily. "Do you think that any power on earth could make me take it if you did, sir?"

But there was Mrs. Boffin to part from, and, in the full flush of her dignity, the impressible little soul collapsed again. Down upon her knees before that good woman, she rocked herself upon her breast, and cried, and sobbed, and folded her in her arms with all her might.

Mrs. Boffin wept most heartily, and embraced her with all fondness; but said not one single word except that she was her dear girl.

Bella broke from her at length, and was going weeping out of the room, when in her own little queer affectionate way, she half relented towards Mr. Boffin.

"I am very glad," sobbed Bella, "that I called you names, sir, because you richly deserved it. But I am very sorry that I called you names, because you used to be so different. Say good-bye!"

"Good-bye," said Mr. Boffin, shortly.

"If I knew which of your hands was the least spoiled, I would ask you to let me touch it," said Bella, "for the last time. But not because I repent of what I have said to you. For I don't. It's true!"

"Try the left hand," said Mr. Boffin, holding it out in a stolid manner; "it's the least used."

"You have been wonderfully good and kind to me," said Bella, "and I kiss it for that. You have been as bad as bad could be to Mr. Rokesmith, and I throw it away for that. Thank you for myself, and good-bye!"

"Good-bye," said Mr. Boffin as before.

Bella caught him round the neck and kissed him, and ran out for ever.

She ran up-stairs, selected those dresses she had brought with her, leaving all the rest, and made a great misshapen bundle of them, to be sent for afterwards.

No one chanced to be about, and she got down to the hall in quiet. The door of the late Secretary's room stood open. She peeped in as she passed, and divined from the emptiness of his table, and the general appearance of things, that he was already gone. Softly opening the great hall door, and

softly closing it upon herself, she turned and kissed it on the outside—insensible old combination of wood and iron that it was!—before she ran away from the house at a swift pace.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE City looked unpromising enough, as Bella made her way along its gritty streets.

“I never was so surprised, my dear!” said her father, as Bella appeared in his office, “and I couldn’t believe my eyes. Upon my life, I thought they had taken to lying! The idea of your coming down the Lane yourself! Why didn’t you send the footman down the Lane, my dear?”

“I have brought no footman with me, Pa.”

“Oh indeed! But you have brought the elegant turn-out, my love?”

“No, Pa.”

“You never can have walked, my dear?”

“Yes, I have, Pa.”

He looked so very much astonished, that Bella could not make up her mind to break it to him just yet.

“The consequence is, Pa, that your lovely woman feels a little faint, and would very much like to share your tea.”

“My dear child,” said her father, “the idea of your partaking of such lowly fare! The idea of a splendid—!” and then looked at her figure, and stopped short.

“What’s the matter, Pa?”

“—of a splendid female,” he resumed more slowly, “putting up with such accommodation as the present!—Is that a new dress you have on, my dear?”

“No, Pa, an old one. Don’t you remember it?”

“Why, I *thought* I remembered it, my dear!”

“You should, for you bought it, Pa!”

“Yes, I *thought* I bought it, my dear!”

“And have you grown so fickle that you don’t like your own taste, Pa, dear?”

“Well, my love,” he returned, swallowing a bit of the cottage-loaf with considerable effort, for it seemed to stick by the way: “I should have thought it was hardly sufficiently splendid for existing circumstances.”

Bella had prepared herself to say: "Pa, dear, don't be cast down, but I must tell you something disagreeable!" when he interrupted her in an unlooked-for manner.

"My gracious me! This is very extraordinary."

"What is, Pa?"

"Why, there's Mr. Rokesmith now!"

"No, no, Pa, no," cried Bella, greatly flurried. "Surely not."

"Yes there is! Look here!"

Sooth to say, Mr. Rokesmith not only passed the window, but came into the counting-house. And not only came into the counting-house, but, finding himself alone there with Bella and her father, rushed at Bella and caught her in his arms, with the rapturous words, "My dear, dear girl; my gallant, generous, disinterested, courageous, noble girl!" And not only that even (which one might have thought astonishment enough for one dose), but Bella, after hanging her head for a moment, lifted it up and laid it on his breast, as if that were her head's chosen and lasting resting-place!

"I knew you would come to him, and I followed you," said Rokesmith. "My love, my life! You ARE mine?"

To which Bella responded, "Yes, I AM yours if you think me worth taking!" And after that, seemed to shrink to next to nothing in the clasp of his arms, partly because it was such a strong one on his part, and partly because there was such a yielding to it on hers.

The cherub staggered back into the window-seat from which he had risen, and surveyed the pair with his eyes dilated to their utmost.

"But we must think of dear Pa," said Bella; "I haven't told dear Pa; let us speak to Pa." Upon which they turned to do so.

"We'll break it to you gently, dearest Pa," said Bella.

"My dear," returned the cherub, looking at them both, "you broke so much in the first—Gush, if I may so express myself—that I think I am equal to a good large breakage now."

"Mr. Wilfer," said John Rokesmith, excitedly and joyfully, "Bella takes me, though I have no fortune, even no

present occupation; nothing but what I can get in the life before us. Bella takes me!"

"Yes, I should rather have inferred, my dear sir," returned the cherub feebly, "that Bella took you, from what I have within these few minutes remarked."

"You don't know, Pa," said Bella, "how ill I have used him!"

"You don't know, sir," said Rokesmith, "what a heart she has!"

"You don't know, Pa," said Bella, "what a shocking creature I was growing, when he saved me from myself!"

"You don't know, sir," said Rokesmith, "what a sacrifice she has made for me!"

"My dear Bella," replied the cherub, still pathetically scared, "and my dear John Rokesmith, if you will allow me so to call you—"

"Yes do, Pa, do!" urged Bella. "I allow you, and my will is his law. Isn't it—dear John Rokesmith?"

There was an engaging shyness in Bella, coupled with an engaging tenderness of love and confidence and pride, in thus first calling him by name, which made it quite excusable in John Rokesmith to do what he did. What he did was once more to give her the appearance of vanishing as aforesaid.

"I think, my dears," observed the cherub, "that if you could make it convenient to sit one on one side of me, and the other on the other, we should get on rather more consecutively, and make things rather plainer." This was done, and step by step the cherub led up to it, until all was clear.

If the counting-house of Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles had ever been shut up by three happier people, glad as most people were to shut it up, they must have been superlatively happy indeed.

The cherub apologetically remarked: "I think, my dears, I'll take the lead on the other side of the road, and seem not to belong to you." Which he did, cherubically strewing the path with smiles, in the absence of flowers.

It was almost ten o'clock when they stopped within view of Wilfer Castle; and then, the spot being quiet and deserted, Bella began a series of disappearances which threatened to last all night.

"I think, John," the cherub hinted at last, "that if you can spare me the young person distantly related to myself, I'll take her in."

"I can't spare her," answered John, "but I must lend her to you.—My Darling!" A word of magic which caused Bella instantly to disappear again.

"Now, dearest Pa," said Bella, when she became visible, "put your hand in mine, and we'll run home as fast as ever we can run, and get it over. Now, Pa. Once!—"

"My dear," the cherub faltered, with something of a craven air, "I was going to observe that if your mother—"

"You mustn't hang back, sir," cried Bella, putting out her right foot; "do you see that, sir? That's the mark: come up to the mark, sir. Once! Twice! Three times and away, Pa!" Off she skimmed, bearing the cherub along, nor ever stopped, nor suffered him to stop, until she had pulled at the bell. "Now, dear Pa," said Bella, taking him by both ears as if he were a pitcher, and conveying his face to her rosy lips, "we are in for it!"

Miss Lavvy came out to open the gate, waited on by that attentive cavalier and friend of the family, Mr. George Sampson. "Why, it's never Bella!" exclaimed Miss Lavvy, starting back at the sight. And then bawled, "Ma! Here's Bella!"

This produced Mrs. Wilfer, who, standing in the portal, received them with ghostly gloom, and all her other appliances of ceremony.

"My child is welcome, though unlooked for," said she, at the time presenting her cheek as if it were a cool slate for visitors to enroll themselves upon. "You too, R. W., are welcome, though late. Does the male domestic of Mrs. Boffin hear me there?" This deep-toned inquiry was cast forth into the night, for response from the menial in question.

"There is no one waiting, Ma, dear," said Bella.

"There is no one waiting?" repeated Mrs. Wilfer in majestic accents.

"No, Ma, dear."

A dignified shiver pervaded Mrs. Wilfer's shoulders and gloves, as who should say, "An Enigma!" and then she

marched at the head of the procession to the family keeping-room.

Miss Lavinia, who had been intently eyeing Bella's bonnet, exclaimed, "Why, Bella!"

"Yes, Lavvy, I know."

The irrepressible lowered her eyes to Bella's dress, and stooped to look at it, exclaiming again: "Why, Bella!"

"Yes, Lavvy, I know what I have got on. I was going to tell Ma, when you interrupted. I have left Mr. Boffin's house for good, Ma, and I have come home again."

Mrs. Wilfer spake no word, but, having glared at her offspring for a minute or two in an awful silence, retired into her corner of state backward, and sat down: like a frozen article on sale in a Russian market.

"In short, dear Ma," said Bella, taking off the depreciated bonnet and shaking out her hair, "I have had a very serious difference with Mr. Boffin on the subject of his treatment of a member of his household, and it's a final difference, and there's an end of all."

"And I am bound to tell you, my dear," added R. W., submissively, "that Bella has acted in a truly brave spirit, and with a truly right feeling. And therefore I hope, my dear, you'll not allow yourself to be greatly disappointed."

"George!" said Miss Lavvy, in a sepulchral, warning voice, founded on her mother's: "George Sampson, speak! What did I tell you about those Boffins?"

Mr. Sampson, perceiving his frail bark to be laboring among shoals and breakers, thought it safest not to refer back to any particular thing that he had been told, lest he should refer back to the wrong thing. With admirable seamanship he got his bark into deep water by murmuring "Yes indeed."

"Yes! I told George Sampson, as George Sampson tells you," said Miss Lavvy, "that these hateful Boffins would pick a quarrel with Bella, as soon as her novelty was worn off. Have they done it, or have they not? Was I right, or was I wrong? And what do you say to us, Bella, of your Boffins now?"

"Lavvy and Ma," said Bella, "I say of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin what I always have said; and I always shall say of them

what I always have said. But nothing will induce me to quarrel with any one to-night. I hope you are not sorry to see me, Ma dear," kissing her; "and I hope you are not sorry to see me, Lavvy," kissing her too; "and as I notice the lettuce on the table, I'll make the salad."

CHAPTER XLIII.

A MAZEMENT sits enthroned upon the countenances of Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Lammle's circle of acquaintance when the disposal of their first-class furniture and effects (including a Billiard Table in capital letters), "by auction, under a bill of sale," is publicly announced on a waving hearthrug in Sackville Street.

The camels are polishing up in the Analytical's pantry for the dinner of wonderment on the occasion of the Lammles going to pieces, and Mr. Twemlow feels a little queer on the sofa at his lodgings over the stable yard in Duke Street, Saint James's, in consequence of having taken two advertised pills at about midday, on the faith of the printed representation accompanying the box, that the same "will be found highly salutary as a precautionary measure in connection with the pleasures of the table." To whom a servant enters with the announcement that a lady wishes to speak to him.

"A lady!" says Twemlow, pluming his ruffled feathers. "Ask the favor of the lady's name."

The lady's name is Lammle. The lady will not detain Mr. Twemlow longer than a very few minutes.

"Show the lady in." Lady shown in, comes in.

"Pray take a seat, Mrs. Lammle." Mrs. Lammle takes a seat and opens the conversation.

"I have no doubt, Mr. Twemlow, that you have heard of a reverse of fortune having befallen us."

Mindful of the wondering dinner, Twemlow, with a little twinge, admits the imputation.

"Probably it will not," says Mrs. Lammle, with a certain hardened manner upon her, that makes Twemlow shrink, "have surprised you so much as some others, after what passed between us at the house which is now turned out at windows. I have taken the liberty of calling upon you, to add a sort of postscript to what I said that day."

"Really," says the uneasy little gentleman, "really Mrs. Lammle, I should take it as a favor if you could excuse me from any further confidence."

"My postscript—to retain the term I have used"—says Mrs. Lammle, fixing her eyes on his face, to enforce what she says herself—"coincides exactly with what you say, Mr. Twemlow. So far from troubling you with any new confidence, I merely wish to remind you what the old one was. I imparted to you a certain piece of knowledge, to be imparted again, as you thought best, to a certain person."

"Which I did," says Twemlow.

"And for doing which, I thank you; though, indeed, I scarcely know why I turned traitress to my husband in the matter, for the girl is a poor little fool. I was a poor little fool once myself; I can find no better reason. Mr. Twemlow, if you should chance to see my husband, or to see me, or to see both of us, in the favor or confidence of any one else, you have no right to use against us the knowledge I intrusted you with, for one especial purpose which has been accomplished. This is what I came to say. It is not a stipulation; to a gentleman it is simply a reminder."

Twemlow makes her a little one-sided bow, as though saying, "Yes, I think you have a right to rely upon me," and then she moistens her lips, and shows a sense of relief.

"Stay!" says Twemlow, rising as she rises. "Pardon me a moment. I should never have sought you out, madam, to say what I am going to say, but since you have sought me out and are here, I will throw it off my mind. Was it quite consistent, in candor, with our taking that resolution against Mr. Fledgeby, that you should afterwards address Mr. Fledgeby as your dear and confidential friend, and entreat a favor of Mr. Fledgeby? Always supposing that you did; I assert no knowledge of my own on the subject; it has been represented to me that you did."

"Then he told you?"

"Yes."

"It is strange that he should have told you the truth," says Mrs. Lammle, seriously pondering. "Pray where did a circumstance so very extraordinary happen?"

Twemlow hesitates. "I encountered Mr. Fledgeby, quite by accident, at Mr. Riah's in Saint Mary Axe."

"Have you the misfortune to be in Mr. Riah's hands, then?"

"Unfortunately, madam," returns Twemlow, "the one money-obligation to which I stand committed, the one debt of my life (but it is a just debt; pray observe that I don't dispute it), has fallen into Mr. Riah's hands."

"Mr. Twemlow," says Mrs. Lammle, fixing his eyes with hers: "it has fallen into Mr. Fledgeby's hands. Mr. Riah is his mask. It has fallen into Mr. Fledgeby's hands. Let me tell you that, for your guidance. The information may be of use to you, if only to prevent your credulity, in judging another man's truthfulness by your own, from being imposed upon."

"Impossible! How do you know it?"

"I scarcely know how I know it. The whole train of circumstances seemed to take fire at once, and show it to me."

As she moves towards the door, Mr. Twemlow, attending on her, expresses his soothing hope that the condition of Mr. Lammle's affairs is not irretrievable.

"I don't know," Mrs. Lammle answers, stopping, and sketching out the pattern of paper on the wall with the point of her parasol; "it depends. There may be an opening for him dawning now, or there may be none. We shall soon find out. If none, we are bankrupt here, and must go abroad, I suppose."

The wondering Veneering dinner is in full progress when the Analytical, perusing a scrap of paper lying on the salver, with the air of a literary Censor, adjusts it, takes his time about going to the table with it, and presents it to Mr. Eugene Wrayburn. Whereupon the pleasant Tippins says aloud, "The Lord Chancellor has resigned!"

With distracting coolness and slowness—for he knows the curiosity of the Charmer to be always devouring—Eugene makes a pretense of getting out an eyeglass, polishing it, and reading the paper with difficulty, long after he has seen what is written on it. What is written on it is:

"Young Blight."

"Waiting?" says Eugene over his shoulder, in confidence, with the Analytical.

"Waiting," returns the Analytical in responsive confidence.

Eugene looks "Excuse me," towards Mrs. Veneering, goes out, and finds Young Blight, Mortimer's clerk, at the hall-door.

"You told me to bring him, sir, to wherever you was, if he come while you was out and I was in," says that discreet young gentleman, standing on tiptoe to whisper; "and I've brought him."

"Sharp boy. Where is he?" asks Eugene.

"He's in a cab, sir, at the door. I thought it best not to show him, you see, if it could be helped; for he's a-shaking all over, like—" Blight's simile is perhaps inspired by the surrounding dishes of sweets—"like Glue Monge."

"Sharp boy again," returns Eugene. "I'll go to him."

Goes out straightway, and, leisurely leaning his arms on the open window of a cab in waiting, looks in at Mr. Dolls: who has brought his own atmosphere with him, and would seem from its odor to have brought it, for convenience of carriage, in a rum-cask.

"Now Dolls, wake up!"

"Mist Wrayburn? Drection! Fifteen shillings!"

After carefully reading the dingy scrap of paper handed to him, and as carefully tucking it into his waistcoat pocket, Eugene tells out the money; beginning incautiously by telling the first shilling into Mr. Dolls's hand, which instantly jerks it out of window; and ending by telling the fifteen shillings on the seat.

Returning to the dining-room, and pausing for an instant behind the screen at the door, Eugene overhears, above the hum and clatter, the fair Tippins saying: "I am dying to ask him what he was called out for!"

"Are you?" mutters Eugene, "then perhaps if you can't ask him, you'll die. So I'll be a benefactor to society, and go."

CHAPTER XLIV.

PLASHWATER Weir-Mill Lock looked tranquil and pretty on an evening in the summer time; but not particularly so to Mr. Riderhood, who sat on one of the blunt wooden levers of his lock-gates, dozing. At the cry of

"Lock, ho! Lock!" he gave his growl a responsive twist at the end, and turned his face down-stream to see who hailed.

It was an amateur sculler, well up to his work though taking it easily, in so light a boat that the Rogue remarked: "A little less on you, and you'd a'most ha' been a Wager-but;" then went to work at his windlass handles and sluices, to let the sculler in. As the latter stood in his boat, holding on by the boat-hook to the woodwork at the lock side, waiting for the gates to open, Rogue Riderhood recognized his "T'other governor," Mr. Eugene Wrayburn; who was, however, too indifferent or too much engaged to recognize him.

The creaking lock-gates opened slowly, and the light boat passed in as soon as there was room enough, and the creaking lock-gates closed upon it, and it floated low down in the dock between the two sets of gates, until the water should rise and the second gates should open and let it out. When Riderhood had run to his second windlass and turned it, and while he leaned against the lever of that gate to help it to swing open presently, he noticed, lying to rest under the hedge by the towing-path astern of the lock, a bargeman.

The water rose and rose as the sluice poured in, dispersing the scum which had formed behind the lumbering gates, and sending the boat up, so that the sculler gradually rose like an apparition against the light from the bargeman's point of view. Riderhood observed that the bargeman rose too, leaning on his arm, and seemed to have his eyes fastened on the rising figure.

But there was the toll to be taken, as the gates were now complaining and opening. The T'other governor tossed it ashore, twisted in a piece of paper, and as he did so, knew his man.

"Ay, ay? It's you, is it, honest friend?" said Eugene, resuming his sculls. "You got the place, then?"

"I got the place, and no thanks to you for it, nor yet none to Lawyer Lightwood."

"We saved our recommendation, honest fellow," said Eugene, "for the next candidate—the one who will offer himself when you are transported or hanged. Don't be long about it; will you be so good?"

So imperturbable was the air with which he gravely bent to his work that Riderhood remained staring at him, without a retort. Having got his gates shut, he crossed back by his plank lock-bridge to the towing-path side of the river.

If, in so doing, he took another glance at the bargeman, he did it by stealth. He cast himself on the grass by the Lock side, in an indolent way, with his back in that direction. The dip of Eugene Wrayburn's sculls had become hardly audible in his ears when the bargeman passed him, putting the utmost width that he could between them, and keeping under the hedge. Then Riderhood sat up and took a long look at his figure, and then cried: "Hi—i—i! Lock, ho! Lock! Plashwater Weir Mill Lock!"

The bargeman stopped, and looked back.

"Plashwater Weir Mill Lock, T'otherest gov—er—nor—or—or—or!" cried Mr. Riderhood, with his hands to his mouth.

The bargeman turned back. Approaching nearer and nearer, the bargeman became Bradley Headstone, in rough water-side second-hand clothing.

"Wish I may die," said Riderhood, smiting his right leg, and laughing, as he sat on the grass, "if you ain't ha' been a imitating me, T'otherest governor! Never thought myself so good-looking afore!"

Truly, Bradley Headstone had taken careful note of the honest man's dress in the course of that night-walk they had had together. He must have committed it to memory, and slowly got it by heart. It was exactly reproduced in the dress he now wore.

"*This* your Lock?" said Bradley, whose surprise had a genuine air: "they told me, where I last inquired, it was the third I should come to. This is only the second."

"It's my belief, governor," returned Riderhood, with a wink and shake of his head, "that you've dropped one in your counting. It ain't Locks as *you've* been giving your mind to. No, no!"

"What other calculations do you suppose I have been occupied with? Mathematics?"

"I never heerd it called that. It's a long word for it. Hows'ever, p'raps you call it so."

"It. What?"

"I'll say them, instead of it, if you like," was the coolly growled reply. "It's safer talk too."

"What do you mean that I should understand by them?"

"Spites, affronts, offenses, giv' and took, deadly aggrawations, such like," answered Riderhood.

"You think I have been following him?" said Bradley.

"I know you have," said Riderhood.

"Well! I have, I have," Bradley admitted. "But," with another anxious look up the river, "he may land."

"Easy you! He won't be lost if he does land," said Riderhood. "He must leave his boat behind him."

"He was speaking to you, just now," said Bradley, kneeling on one knee on the grass. "What did he say?"

"Cheek," said Riderhood.

"What?"

"Cheek," repeated Riderhood, with an angry oath; "cheek is what he said. He can't say nothing but cheek. I'd ha' liked to plump down aboard of him, neck and crop, with a heavy jump, and sunk him."

Bradley turned away his haggard face for a few moments, and then said, tearing up a tuft of grass:

"Damn him!"

"Hooroar!" cried Riderhood. "Does you credit! Then I make out, T'otherest, as he is a-going to her?"

"He left London, yesterday. I have hardly a doubt, this time, that at last he is going to her."

"You ain't sure, then?"

"I am as sure here," said Bradley, with a clutch at the breast of his coarse shirt, "as if it was written there;" with a blow or a stab at the sky.

"Ah! But judging from the looks on you," retorted Riderhood, "you've made ekally sure afore, and have got disapinted. It has told upon you."

"Listen," said Bradley, in a low voice, bending forward to lay his hand upon the lock-keeper's shoulder. "These are my holidays."

"Are they, by George!" muttered Riderhood, with his eyes on the passion-wasted face. "Your working days must be stiff 'uns, if these is your holidays."

"And I have never left him," pursued Bradley, waving the interruption aside with an impatient hand, "since they began. And I never will leave him now, till I have seen him with her."

"And when you have seen him with her?"

"—I'll come back to you."

Riderhood stiffened the knee on which he had been resting, got up, and looked gloomily at his new friend. After a few moments they walked side by side in the direction the boat had taken, as if by tacit consent; Bradley pressing forward, and Riderhood holding back.

"I have a pound for you," said Bradley.

"You've two," said Riderhood.

Bradley held a sovereign between his fingers. Riderhood held his left hand open. Bradley dipped in his purse for another sovereign, and two chinked in Riderhood's hand.

"Now, I must follow him," said Bradley Headstone.

Turning back towards his lock, the Rogue pondered as deeply as it was within the contracted power of such a fellow to do. "Why did he copy my clothes? He could have looked like what he wanted to look like, without that." Was it done by accident? The setting of a trap for finding out whether it was accidentally done, soon superseded, as a practical piece of cunning, the abstruser inquiry why otherwise it was done. And he devised a means.

Rogue Riderhood took off the rusty colorless wisp that he wore round his throat, and substituted a red neckerchief, leaving the long ends flowing. "Now," said the Rogue, "if arter he sees me in this neckhankecher, I see him in a sim'lar neckhankecher, it won't be accident!"

"Lock ho! Lock!" It was a light night, and a barge coming down summoned him out of a long doze. In due course he had let the barge through and was alone again, looking to the closing of his gates, when Bradley Headstone appeared before him, standing on the brink of the lock.

"Halloa!" said Riderhood. "Back a' ready, T'other-est?"

"He has put up for the night, at an Angler's Inn," was the fatigued and hoarse reply. "He goes on, up the river, at six in the morning. I have come back for a co'uple of hours'rest."

"You want 'em," said Riderhood.

"I don't want them," returned Bradley, irritably, "because I would rather not have them, but would much prefer to follow him all night."

"But hadn't you better come in and take your couple o' hours' rest?"

"Thank you. Yes."

He followed Riderhood into the lock-house, where the latter produced from a cupboard some cold salt beef and half a loaf, some gin in a bottle, and some water in a jug. The last he brought in, cool and dripping, from the river.

"There, T'otherest," said Riderhood, stooping over him to put it on the table. "You'd better take a bite and a sup, afore you take your snooze." The draggling ends of the red neckerchief caught the schoolmaster's eye. Riderhood saw him look at it.

"Oh!" thought that worthy. "You're a-taking notice, are you? Come! You shall have a good squint at it then." With which reflection he sat down on the other side of the table, threw open his vest, and made a pretense of re-tying the neckerchief with much deliberation.

Bradley ate and drank, and soon afterwards, divesting himself only of his shoes and coat, laid himself down.

Riderhood, leaning back in his wooden arm-chair with his arms folded on his breast, looked at him lying with his right hand clenched in his sleep and his teeth set, until a film came over his own sight, and he slept too. He awoke to find that it was daylight, and that his visitor was already astir, and going out to the river-side to cool his head:—"Though I'm blessed," muttered Riderhood at the lock-house door, looking after him, "if I think there's water enough in all the Thames to do *that* for you!" Within five minutes he had taken his departure, and was passing on into the calm distance as he had passed yesterday. Riderhood knew when a fish leaped, by his starting and glancing round.

"Lock ho! Lock!" at intervals all day, and "Lock ho! Lock!" thrice in the ensuing night, but no return of Bradley. The second day was sultry and oppressive. In the afternoon a thunderstorm came up, and had but newly broken into a furious sweep of rain when he rushed in at the door, like the storm itself.

"You've seen him with her!" exclaimed Riderhood.

"I have."

"Where?"

"At his journey's end. His boat's hauled up for three days. I heard him give the order. Then, I saw him wait for her and meet her. I saw them—" he stopped as though he were suffocating, and began again—"I saw them walking side by side, last night."

"What did you do?"

"Nothing."

"What are you going to do?"

He dropped into a chair, and laughed. Immediately afterwards, a great spirt of blood burst from his nose.

"How does that happen?" asked Riderhood.

"I don't know. I can't keep it back. It has happened twice—three times—four times—I don't know how many times—since last night. I taste it, smell it, see it, it chokes me, and then it breaks out like this."

He went into the pelting rain again with his head bare, and bending low over the river, and scooping up the water with his two hands, washed the blood away. All beyond his figure, as Riderhood looked from the door, was a vast dark curtain in solemn movement towards one quarter of the heavens. He raised his head and came back, wet from head to foot, but with the lower part of his sleeves, where he had dipped into the river, streaming water.

"Your face is like a ghost's," said Riderhood.

"Did you ever see a ghost?" was the sullen retort.

"I mean to say you are quite wore out."

"That may well be. I have had no rest since I left here. I don't remember that I have so much as sat down since I left here."

"Lie down now, then," said Riderhood.

"I will, if you will give me something to quench my thirst."

The bottle and jug were again produced, and he mixed a weak draught, and another, and drank both in quick succession. "You asked me something," he said then.

"No, I didn't," replied Riderhood.

"I tell you," retorted Bradley, turning upon him in a wild

and desperate manner, "you asked me something, before I went out to wash my face in the river."

"Oh! Then?" said Riderhood, backing a little. "I asked you wot you was a-going to do."

"How can a man in this state know?" he answered, protesting with both his tremulous hands, with an action so vigorously angry that he shook the water from his sleeves upon the floor, as if he had wrung them. "How can I plan anything if I haven't sleep?"

"Why, that's what I as good as said," returned the other. "Didn't I say lie down?"

"Well, perhaps you did."

"Well! Anyways I says it again. Sleep where you slept last; the sounder and longer you can sleep, the better you'll know arterwards what you're up to."

His pointing to the truckle bed in the corner seemed gradually to bring that poor couch to Bradley's wandering remembrance. He slipped off his worn down-trodden shoes, and cast himself heavily upon the bed.

Riderhood sat down in his wooden arm-chair, and looked through the window at the lightning, and listened to the thunder. But his thoughts were far from being absorbed by the thunder and the lightning, for again and again and again he looked very curiously at the exhausted man upon the bed. The man had turned up the collar of the rough coat he wore, to shelter himself from the storm, and had buttoned it about his neck. Unconscious of that, and of most things, he had left the coat so, both when he had laved his face in the river, and when he had cast himself upon the bed; though it would have been much easier to him if he had unloosened it.

"He sleeps sound," said Riderhood, "yet he's that up to me and that noticing of me that my getting out of my chair may wake him, when a rattling peal won't; let alone my touching of him."

He very cautiously rose to his feet. "T'otherest," he said, in a low, calm voice, "are you a-lying easy? There's a chill in the air, governor. Shall I put a coat over you?"

The sleeper moving an arm, he sat down again in his chair, and feigned to watch the storm from the window.

It was at the concealed throat of the sleeper that Rider-

hood so often looked so curiously, until the sleep seemed to deepen into the stupor of the dead-tired in mind and body. Then Riderhood came from the window cautiously, and stood by the bed.

"Poor man!" he murmured in a low tone, with a crafty face, and a very watchful eye and ready foot, lest he should start up; "this here coat of his must make him uneasy in his sleep. Shall I loosen it for him, and make him more comfortable? I think I ought to it, poor man. I think I will."

He touched the first button with a very cautious hand, and a step backward. But, the sleeper remaining in profound unconsciousness, he touched the other buttons with a more assured hand, and perhaps the more lightly on that account. Softly and slowly, he opened the coat and drew it back.

The draggling ends of a bright-red neckerchief were then disclosed, and he had even been at the pains of dipping parts of it in some liquid, to give it the appearance of having become stained by wear. With a much-perplexed face, Riderhood looked from it to the sleeper, and from the sleeper to it, and finally crept back to his chair, and there, with his hand to his chin, sat long in a brown study, looking at both.

CHAPTER XLV.

ON one of the reading evenings at the Bower, Mr. Boffin kissed Mrs. Boffin after a five o'clock dinner, and trotted out, nursing his big stick in both arms, so that, as of old, it seemed to be whispering in his ear.

Mr. Boffin and his stick went on alone together, until they arrived at certain cross-ways where they would be likely to fall in with any one coming, at about the same time, from Clerkenwell to the Bower. Here they stopped, and Mr. Boffin consulted his watch.

"It wants five minutes, good, to Venus's appointment," said he. "I'm rather early."

But Venus was a punctual man, and, even as Mr. Boffin replaced his watch in his pocket, was to be descried coming towards him.

"Thank'ee, Venus," said Mr. Boffin. "Thank'ee, thank'ee, thank'ee! Now that you've been to see me, and have consented to keep up the appearance before Wegg of remaining in it for a time, I have got a sort of a backer. Do you think Wegg is likely to drop down upon me to-night, Venus?"

"I think he is, sir."

They rang at the Bower gate. The stumping approach of Wegg was soon heard behind it, and as it turned upon its hinges he became visible.

"Mr. Boffin, sir? You're quite a stranger!"

"Yes. I've been otherwise occupied, Wegg."

"Have you indeed, sir?" returned the literary gentleman, with a threatening sneer. "Hah! I've been looking for you, sir, rather what I may call specially."

"You don't say so, Wegg?"

"Yes, I do say so, sir. And if you hadn't come round to me to-night, dash my wig if I wouldn't have come round to you to-morrow. Now! I tell you!"

"Nothing wrong, I hope, Wegg?"

"Oh no, Mr. Boffin," was the ironical answer. "Nothing wrong! What should be wrong in Boffinses Bower! Step in, sir."

'If you'll come to the Bower I've shaded for you,

Your bed shan't be roses all spangled with doo:

Will you, will you, will you, will you, come to the Bower?

Oh, won't you, won't you, won't you, won't you, come to the Bower?"

An unholy glare of contradiction and offense shone in the eyes of Mr. Wegg, as he turned the key on his patron, after ushering him into the yard with this vocal quotation. Mr. Boffin's air was crestfallen and submissive. Whispered Wegg to Venus, as they crossed the yard behind him: "Look at the worm and minion; he's down in the mouth already." Whispered Venus to Wegg; "That's because I've told him. I've prepared the way for you."

Mr. Boffin, entering the usual chamber, laid his stick upon the settle usually reserved for him, thrust his hands into his pockets, and, with his shoulders raised and his hat drooping back upon them, looked disconsolately at Wegg. "My

friend and partner, Mr. Venus, gives me to understand," remarked that man of might, addressing him, "that you are aware of our power over you. Now, when you have took your hat off, we'll go into that pint."

Mr. Boffin shook it off with one shake, so that it dropped on the floor behind him, and remained in his former attitude with his former rueful look upon him.

"First of all, I'm a-going to call you Boffin, for short. If you don't like it, it's open to you to lump it."

"I don't mind it, Wegg," Mr. Boffin replied.

"That's lucky for you, Boffin. Now, do you want to be read to?"

"I don't particularly care about it to-night, Wegg."

"Because if you did want to," pursued Mr. Wegg, the brilliancy of whose point was dimmed by his having been unexpectedly answered: "you wouldn't be. I've been your slave long enough. I'm not to be trampled underfoot by a dustman any more. With the single exception of the salary, I renounce the whole and total sitiuation."

"Since you say it is to be so, Wegg," returned Mr. Boffin, with folded hands, "I suppose it must be."

"I suppose it must be," Wegg retorted. "Next (to clear the ground before coming to business), you've placed in this yard a skulking, a sneaking, and a sniffing menial."

"He hadn't a cold in his head when I sent him here," said Mr. Boffin.

"Boffin!" retorted Wegg, "I warn you not to attempt a joke with me! Any how, and every how, he has been planted here, and he is here. Now, I won't have him here. So I call upon Boffin, before I say another word, to fetch him in and send him packing to the right-about."

The unsuspecting Sloppy was at that moment airing his many buttons within view of the window. Mr. Boffin opened the window and beckoned him to come in.

"I call upon Boffin," said Wegg, "to inform that menial that I am master here!"

In humble obedience, when the button-gleaming Sloppy entered, Mr. Boffin said to him: "Sloppy, my fine fellow, Mr. Wegg is master here. He doesn't want you, and you are to go from here."

"For good!" Mr. Wegg severely stipulated.

"For good," said Mr. Boffin.

Sloppy stared, with both his eyes and all his buttons, and his mouth wide open; but was without loss of time escorted forth by Silas Wegg, pushed out at the yard gate by the shoulders, and locked out.

"The atomspear," said Wegg, stumping back into the room again, a little reddened by his late exertion, "is now freer for the purposes of respiration. Mr. Venus, sir, take a chair. Boffin, you may sit down."

"I never meant, my dear Wegg—" Mr. Boffin was beginning, when Silas stopped him.

"Hold your tongue, Boffin! Answer when you're called upon to answer. You'll find you've got quite enough to do. Now you're aware—are you—that you're in possession of property to which you've no right at all?"

"Venus tells me so," said Mr. Boffin.

"I tell you so," returned Silas. "Now, here's my hat, Boffin, and here's my walking-stick. Trifle with me, and instead of making a bargain with you, I'll put on my hat and take up my walking-stick and go out, and make a bargain with the rightful owner. Now, what do you say?"

"I say," returned Mr. Boffin, leaning forward in alarmed appeal, with his hands on his knees, "that I am sure I don't want to trifle, Wegg. I have said so to Venus."

"You certainly have, sir," said Venus.

"Then at once you confess yourself desirous to come to terms, do you, Boffin?"

"I am willing, Wegg, to come to terms."

"Willing won't do, Boffin. I won't take willing. Are you desirous to come to terms?"

"Yes. I ask to be allowed to come to terms, supposing your document is all correct."

"Don't you be afraid of that," said Silas, poking his head at him. "You shall be satisfied by seeing it. Mr. Venus will show it you, and I'll hold you the while. Then you want to know what the terms are. Now mark, Boffin, mark 'em well, because they're the lowest terms and the only terms. You'll throw your Mound (the little Mound as comes to you any way) into the general estate, and then

you'll divide the whole property into three parts, and you'll keep one and hand over the others."

Mr. Venus's mouth screwed itself up, as Mr. Boffin's face lengthened itself; Mr. Venus not having been prepared for such a rapacious demand.

"Now, wait a bit, Boffin," Wegg proceeded, "there's something more. You've been a-squandering this property—laying some of it out on yourself. *That* won't do. You've bought a house. You'll be charged for it."

"I shall be ruined, Wegg!" Mr. Boffin faintly protested.

"Now wait a bit, Boffin; there's something more. You'll leave me in sole custody of these Mounds till they're all laid low. If any valuables should be found in 'em, I'll take care of such valuables. You'll produce your contract for the sale of the Mounds, that we may know to a penny what they're worth, and you'll make out likewise an exact list of all the other property. When the Mounds is cleared away to the last shovel-full, the final diwision will come off."

"Dreadful, dreadful! I shall die in a work-house!" cried the Golden Dustman, with his hands to his head.

"Now, wait a bit, Boffin; there's something more. You've been unlawfully ferreting about this yard. You've been seen in the act of ferreting about this yard. Two pair of eyes at the present moment brought to bear upon you, have seen you dig up a Dutch bottle."

"It was mine, Wegg," protested Mr. Boffin. "I put it there myself."

"What was in it, Boffin?" inquired Silas.

"Not gold, not silver, not bank notes, not jewels, nothing that you could turn into money, Wegg; upon my soul!"

"Prepared, Mr. Venus," said Wegg, turning to his partner with a knowing and superior air, "for an ewasive answer on the part of our dusty friend here, I have hit out a little idea which I think will meet your views. We charge that bottle against our dusty friend at a thousand pounds."

Mr. Boffin drew a deep groan.

"Now, wait a bit, Boffin; there's something more. In your employment is an underhanded sneak, named Roke-smith. It won't answer to have *him* about, while this business of ours is about. He must be discharged."

"Rokesmith is already discharged," said Mr. Boffin, speaking in a muffled voice, with his hands before his face, as he rocked himself on the settle.

"Already discharged, is he?" returned Wegg, surprised. "Then, Boffin, I believe there's nothing more at present."

The unlucky gentleman continuing to rock himself to and fro, and to utter an occasional moan, Mr. Venus besought him to bear up against his reverses, and to take time to accustom himself to the thought of his new position.

At length, Mr. Boffin entreated to be allowed a quarter of an hour's grace, and a cooling walk of that duration in the yard. With some difficulty Mr. Wegg granted this great favor, but only on condition that he accompanied Mr. Boffin in his walk, as not knowing what he might fraudulently unearth if he were left to himself.

"I can't help myself!" cried Mr. Boffin, flouncing on the settle in a forlorn manner, with his hands deep in his pockets, as if his pockets had sunk. "What's the good of my pretending to stand out, when I can't help myself? I must give in to the terms. But I should like to see the document."

Wegg, who was all for clinching the nail he had so strongly driven home, announced that Boffin should see it without an hour's delay, and they set out for Mr. Venus's establishment.

When all was snug, and the shop-door fastened, Mr. Venus said: "I suppose, Mr. Wegg, we may now produce the paper?"

"Now, Mr. Venus," said Silas, taking off his coat, "when I catches our friend here round the arms and body, and pins him tight to the back of the chair, you may show him what he wants to see. If you'll open it and hold it well up in one hand, sir, and a candle in the other, he can read it charming."

Mr. Boffin seemed rather inclined to object to these precautionary arrangements, but, being immediately embraced by Wegg, resigned himself. Venus then produced the document, and Mr. Boffin slowly spelled it out aloud: so very slowly, that Wegg, who was holding him in the chair with the grip of a wrestler, became exceedingly the worse for his exertions. "Say when you've put it safe back, Mr. Venus," he uttered with difficulty, "for the strain of this is terrimenjious."

At length the document was restored to its place.

"Well, Boffin!" said Wegg, as soon as he was in a condition to speak. "Now, you know."

"Yes, Wegg," said Mr. Boffin, meekly. "Now, I know."

"You have no doubts about it, Boffin."

"No, Wegg. None," was the slow and sad reply.

"Then, take care, you," said Wegg, "that you stick to your conditions. I haven't mentioned one thing, because it's a detail that comes of course. You must be followed up, you know. You must be kept under inspection."

"I don't quite understand," said Mr. Boffin.

"Don't you?" sneered Wegg. "Where's your wits, Boffin? Till the Mounds is down and this business completed, you're accountable for all the property, recollect. Consider yourself accountable to me. Mr. Venus here being too milk-and-watery with you, I am the boy for you."

"I've been a-thinking," said Mr. Boffin, in a tone of despondency, "that I must keep the knowledge from my old lady."

"The knowledge of the diwision, d'ye mean?"

"Yes. If she was to die first of us two she might then think all her life, poor thing, that I had got the rest of the fortune still, and was saving it."

"Well," said Wegg, contemptuously, "keep it from your old lady. I ain't going to tell her. I can have you under close inspection without that. I'm as good a man as you, and better. Ask me to dinner. Give me the run of your 'ouse. I was good enough for you and your old lady once, when I helped you out with your weal and hammers. Was there no Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker, before *you* two?"

"Gently, Mr. Wegg, gently," Venus urged.

"Milk-and-water-erily you mean, sir. I've got him under inspection, and I'll inspect him.

'Along the line the signal ran
England expects as this present man
Will keep Boffin to his duty.'

—Boffin, I'll see you home."

CHAPTER XLVI.

CHERUBIC Pa arose with as little noise as possible from beside majestic Ma, one morning early, having a holiday before him. Pa and the lovely woman had a rather particular appointment to keep.

Yet Pa and the lovely woman were not going out together. Bella was up before four, but had no bonnet on. She was waiting at the foot of the stairs—was sitting on the bottom stair, in fact—to receive Pa when he came down, but her only object seemed to be to get Pa well out of the house.

Bella then, returning to the bedroom where Lavvy the Irrepressible still slumbered, put on a little bonnet of quiet, but on the whole of sly appearance, which she had yesterday made. “I am going for a walk, Lavvy,” she said, as she stooped down and kissed her. The Irrepressible, with a bounce in the bed, and a remark that it wasn’t time to get up yet, relapsed into unconsciousness, if she had come out of it.

Behold Bella tripping along the streets, the dearest girl afoot under the summer sun! Behold Pa waiting for Bella behind a pump. Behold Bella and Pa aboard an early steamboat bound for Greenwich.

Were they expected at Greenwich? Probably. At least, Mr. John Rokesmith was on the pier looking out, about a couple of hours before the coaly (but to him gold-dusty) little steamboat got her steam up in London. Probably. At least, Mr. John Rokesmith seemed perfectly satisfied when he descried them on board. Probably. At least, Bella no sooner stepped ashore than she took Mr. John Rokesmith’s arm, without evincing surprise, and the two walked away together with an ethereal air of happiness which, as it were, wafted up from the earth and drew after them a gruff and glum old pensioner to see it out. Two wooden legs had this gruff and glum old pensioner, and, a minute before Bella stepped out of the boat, and drew that confiding little arm of hers through Rokesmith’s, he had had no object in life but tobacco, and not enough of that. Stranded was Gruff and Glum in a harbor of everlasting mud, when all in an instant Bella floated him, and away he went.

Say, cherubic parent taking the lead, in what direction do

we steer first? With some such inquiry in his thoughts, Gruff and Glum, stricken by so sudden an interest that he perked his neck and looked over the intervening people, as if he were trying to stand on tiptoe with his two wooden legs, took an observation of R. W. There was no "first" in the case, Gruff and Glum made out; the cherubic parent was bearing down and crowding on direct for Greenwich church, to see his relations. Be it as it might, he gave his moorings the slip, and followed in chase.

The cherub went before, all beaming smiles; Bella and John Rokesmith followed; Gruff and Glum stuck to them like wax.

Who taketh? I, John, and so do I, Bella. Who giveth? I, R. W. Forasmuch, Gruff and Glum, as John and Bella have consented together in holy wedlock, you may (in short) consider it done, and withdraw your two wooden legs from this temple. To the foregoing purport, the Minister speaking as directed by the Rubric, to the People, selectly represented in the present instance by G. and G. above mentioned.

And now, the church-porch having swallowed up Bella Wilfer for ever and ever, had it not in its power to relinquish that young woman, but slid into the happy sunlight, Mrs. John Rokesmith instead. And long on the bright steps stood Gruff and Glum, looking after the pretty bride, with a narcotic consciousness of having dreamed a dream.

After which, Bella took out from her pocket a little letter, and read it aloud to Pa and John; this being a true copy of the same.

"DEAREST MA:

"I hope you won't be angry, but I am most happily married to Mr. John Rokesmith, who loves me better than I can ever deserve, except by loving him with all my heart. I thought it best not to mention it beforehand, in case it should cause any little difference at home. Please tell darling Pa. With love to Lavvy,

"Ever, dearest Ma,

"Your affectionate daughter,

"BELLA

"(P.S.—Rokesmith)."

Then John Rokesmith put the queen's countenance on the letter—when had Her Gracious Majesty looked so benign as on that blessed morning!—and then Bella popped it into the post-office, and said merrily, “Now, dearest Pa, you are safe, and will never be taken alive!”

Pa was, at first, in the stirred depths of his conscience, so far from sure of being safe yet, that he made out majestic matrons lurking in ambush among the harmless trees of Greenwich Park, and seemed to see a stately countenance tied up in a well-known pocket-handkerchief glooming down at him from a window of the Observatory, where the Familiars of the Astronomer Royal nightly outwatch the winking stars. But, the minutes passing on and no Mrs. Wilfer in the flesh appearing, he became more confident, and so repaired with good heart and appetite to Mr. and Mrs. John Rokesmith's modest little cottage on Blackheath, where breakfast was ready.

Then they, all three, out for a charming ride, and for a charming stroll among heath in bloom, behold the identical Gruff and Glum with his wooden legs horizontally disposed before him, who said that if it warn't a liberty he wished her ji and the fairest of fair wind and weather; further, in a general way requesting to know what cheer? and scrambling up on his two wooden legs to salute, hat in hand, ship-shape, with the gallantry of a man-of-warsman and a heart of oak.

But the marriage dinner was the crowning success, for what had bride and bridegroom plotted to do, but to have and to hold that dinner in the very room of the very hotel where Pa and the lovely woman had once dined together! Bella sat between Pa and John, and divided her attentions pretty equally, but felt it necessary (in the waiter's absence) to remind Pa that she was *his* lovely woman no longer.

“I am well aware of it, my dear,” returned the cherub, “and I resign you willingly.”

“Willingly, sir? You ought to be broken-hearted.”

“So I should be, my dear, if I thought that I was going to lose you.”

“But you know you are not; don't you, poor dear Pa? You know that you have only made a new relation who will be as fond of you and as thankful to you—for my sake and your own sake both—as I am; don't you, dear little Pa?”

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE impressive gloom with which Mrs. Wilfer received her husband on his return from the wedding, knocked so hard at the door of the cherubic conscience, and likewise so impaired the firmness of the cherubic legs, that the culprit's tottering condition of mind and body might have roused suspicion in less occupied persons than the grimly heroic lady, Miss Lavinia, and that esteemed friend of the family, Mr. George Sampson. But, the attention of all three being fully possessed by the main fact of the marriage, they had happily none to bestow on the guilty conspirator; to which fortunate circumstance he owed the escape for which he was in nowise indebted to himself.

"You do not, R. W.," said Mrs Wilfer from her stately corner, "inquire for your daughter Bella."

"To be sure, my dear," he returned, with a most flagrant assumption of unconsciousness, "I did omit it. How—or perhaps I should rather say where—is Bella?"

"Not here," Mrs. Wilfer proclaimed, with folded arms.

The cherub faintly muttered something to the abortive effect of "Oh, indeed, my dear!"

"Not here," repeated Mrs. Wilfer, in a stern sonorous voice. "In a word, R. W., you have no daughter Bella."

"No daughter Bella, my dear?"

"No. Your daughter Bella," said Mrs. Wilfer, with a lofty air of never having had the least copartnership in that young lady: of whom she now made reproachful mention as an article of luxury which her husband had set up entirely on his own account, and in direct opposition to her advice: "your daughter Bella has bestowed herself upon a Mendicant."

"Good gracious, my dear!"

"Show your father his daughter Bella's letter, Lavinia," said Mrs. Wilfer, in her monotonous Act of Parliament tone, and waving her hand. "I think your father will admit it to be documentary proof of what I tell him. I believe your father is acquainted with his daughter Bella's writing. But I do not know. He may tell you he is not. Nothing will surprise me."

"Posted at Greenwich, and dated this morning," said the Irrepressible, flouncing at her father in handing him the evidence. "Hopes Ma won't be angry, but is happily married to Mr. John Rokesmith, and didn't mention it beforehand to avoid words, and please tell darling you, and love to me, and I should like to know what you'd have said if any other unmarried member of the family had done it!"

He read the letter, and faintly exclaimed, "Dear me!"

"You may well say Dear me!" rejoined Mrs. Wilfer, in a deep tone. Upon which encouragement he said it again, though scarcely with the success he had expected; for the scornful lady then remarked, with extreme bitterness, "You said that before."

"It's very surprising. But I suppose, my dear," hinted the cherub, as he folded the letter after a disconcerting silence, "that we must make the best of it? Would you object to my pointing out, my dear, that Mr. John Rokesmith is not (so far as I am acquainted with him), strictly speaking, a Mendicant."

"Indeed?" returned Mrs. Wilfer, with an awful air of politeness. "Truly so? I was not aware that Mr. John Rokesmith was a gentleman of landed property. But I am much relieved to hear it."

"I doubt if you *have* heard it, my dear," the cherub submitted with hesitation.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Wilfer. "I make false statements, it appears? So be it. If my daughter flies in my face, surely my husband may. The one thing is not more unnatural than the other. There seems a fitness in the arrangement. By all means!" Assuming, with a shiver of resignation, a deadly cheerfulness.

But here the Irrepressible skirmished into the conflict, dragging the reluctant form of Mr. Sampson after her.

"Ma," interposed the young lady, "I must say I think it would be much better if you would keep to the point, and not hold forth about people's flying into people's faces, which is nothing more nor less than impossible nonsense."

"How!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilfer, knitting her dark brows.

"Just im-possible nonsense, Ma," returned Lavvy, "and George Sampson knows it is, as well as I do."

Mrs. Wilfer, suddenly becoming petrified, fixed her indignant eyes upon the wretched George; who, divided between the support due from him to his love, and the support due from him to his love's mamma, supported nobody, not even himself.

"The true point is," pursued Lavinia, "that Bella has behaved in a most unsisterly way to me, and might have severely compromised me with George and with George's family, by making off and getting married in this very low and disreputable manner—with some pew-opener or other, I suppose, for a bridesmaid—when she ought to have confided in me, and ought to have said, 'If, Lavvy, you consider it due to your engagement with George, that you should countenance the occasion by being present, then Lavvy, I beg you to be present, keeping my secret from Ma and Pa.' As of course I should have done."

"As of course you would have done? Ingrate!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilfer. "Viper!"

"I say! You know, ma'am. Upon my honor, you mustn't," Mr. Sampson remonstrated, shaking his head seriously. "With the highest respect for you, ma'am, upon my life you mustn't. No, really, you know. When a man with the feelings of a gentleman finds himself engaged to a young lady, and it comes (even on the part of a member of the family) to vipers, you know!—I would merely put it to your own good feeling, you know," said Mr. Sampson, in rather lame conclusion.

Mrs. Wilfer's baleful stare at the young gentleman in acknowledgment of his obliging interference was of such a nature that Miss Lavinia burst into tears, and caught him round the neck for his protection.

"My own unnatural mother," screamed the young lady, "wants to annihilate George! But you shan't be annihilated, George. I'll die first!"

Mr. Sampson, in the arms of his mistress, still struggled to shake his head at Mrs. Wilfer, and to remark: "With every sentiment of respect for you, you know, ma'am—vipers really doesn't do you credit."

"You shall not be annihilated, George!" cried Miss Lavinia. "Ma shall destroy me first, and then she'll be con-

tented. Oh, oh, oh! Have I lured George from his happy home to expose him to this! George, dear, be free! Leave me, ever dearest George, to Ma and to my fate. Give my love to your aunt, George dear, and implore her not to curse the viper that has crossed your path and blighted your existence. Oh, oh, oh!" The young lady, who, hysterically speaking, was only just come of age, and had never gone off yet, here fell into a highly creditable crisis, which, regarded as a first performance, was very successful; Mr. Sampson bending over the body meanwhile in a state of distraction, which induced him to address Mrs. Wilfer in the inconsistent expressions: "Demon—with the highest respect for you—behold your work!"

Within a few weeks afterwards, the Mendicant's bride (arm-in-arm with the Mendicant) came to tea, in fulfillment of an engagement made through her father.

"Dearest Ma," cried Bella, running into the room with a radiant face, "how do you do, dearest Ma?" And then embraced her, joyously. "And Lavvy darling, how do *you* do, and how's George Sampson, and how is he getting on, and when are you going to be married, and how rich are you going to grow? You must tell me all about it, Lavvy dear, immediately. John, love, kiss Ma and Lavvy, and then we shall all be at home and comfortable."

Mrs. Wilfer stared, but was helpless. Miss Lavinia stared, but was helpless. Apparently with no compunction, and assuredly with no ceremony, Bella tossed her bonnet away, and sat down to make tea.

"And now you will naturally want to know, dearest Ma and Lavvy, how we live, and what we have got to live upon. Well, we live on Blackheath, in the charm—ingest of dolls' houses, de—lightfully furnished, and we have a clever little servant who is de—cidedly pretty, and we are economical and orderly, and do everything by clock-work, and we have a hundred and fifty pounds a year, and we have all we want, and more. And lastly, if you would like to know in confidence, as perhaps you may, what is my opinion of my husband, my opinion is—that I almost love him!"

"And if you would like to know in confidence, as perhaps *you* may," said her husband, smiling, as he stood by her side,

without her having detected his approach, "my opinion of my wife, my opinion is—" But Bella started up, and put her hand upon his lips.

"Stop, sir! No, John, dear! Seriously! Please not yet awhile! I want to be something so much worthier than the doll in the doll's house."

"My darling, are you not?"

"Not half, not a quarter, so much worthier as I hope you may some day find me! Try me through some reverse, John—try me through some trial—and tell them after *that*, what you think of me."

"I will, my Life," said John. "I promise it."

"That's my dear John. And you won't speak a word now; will you?"

"And I won't," said John, with a very expressive look of admiration around him, "speak a word now!"

She laid her laughing cheek upon his breast to thank him, and said, looking at the rest of them sidewise out of her bright eyes: "I'll go further, Pa and Ma and Lavvy. John don't suspect it—he has no idea of it—but I quite love him!"

The newly-married pair left early, so that they might walk at leisure to their starting-place from London, for Greenwich.

Her married life glided happily on. She was alone all day, for, after an early breakfast, her husband repaired every morning to the City, and did not return until their late dinner hour. He was "in a China house," he explained to Bella; which she found quite satisfactory, without pursuing the China house into minuter details than a wholesale vision of tea, rice, odd-smelling silks, carved boxes, and tight-eyed people in more than double-soled shoes, with their pigtailed pulling their hair off, painted on transparent porcelain.

"You have such a cheerful spirit!" said John, fondly. "You are like a bright light in the house."

"Am I truly, John?"

"Are you truly? Yes, indeed. Only much more and much better."

"Do you know, John dear," said Bella, taking him by a button of his coat, "that I sometimes, at odd moments—don't laugh, John, please."

Nothing should induce John to do it, when she asked him not to do it.

"—That I sometimes think, John. I feel a little serious."

"Are you too much alone, my darling?"

"O dear, no, John! The time is so short that I have not a moment too much in the week."

"Why serious, my life, then? When serious?"

"When I laugh, I think," said Bella, laughing as she laid her head upon his shoulder. "You wouldn't believe, sir, that I feel serious now? But I do." And she laughed again, and something glistened in her eyes.

"Would you like to be rich, pet?" he asked her coaxingly.

"Rich, John! How *can* you ask such goose's questions?"

"Do you regret anything, my love?"

"Regret anything? No!" Bella confidently answered. But then, suddenly changing, she said between laughing and glistening: "Oh yes, I do though. I regret Mrs. Boffin!"

"I, too, regret that separation very much. But perhaps it is only temporary. Perhaps things may so fall out, as that we may sometimes see her again." Bella might be very anxious on the subject, but she scarcely seemed so at the moment. With an absent air, she was investigating that button on her husband's coat, when Pa came in to spend the evening.

"You go a little way with Pa, John?" said Bella, when the visit was over.

"Yes, my dear. Do you?"

"I have not written to Lizzie Hexam since I wrote and told her that I really had a lover—a whole one. I am in the humor to tell her so to-night, John, and I'll stay at home and do it. Good-night, you dear, good, gentle Pa!"

Left to herself, she wrote Lizzie a long letter. She had but completed it, when her husband came back. "You are just in time, sir," said Bella; "I am going to give you your first curtain lecture. It shall be a parlor-curtain lecture. You shall take this chair, and you'll soon find yourself taken to task soundly. Now, sir! To begin at the beginning. What is your name?"

A question more decidedly rushing at the secret he was

keeping from her, could not have astounded him. But he kept his countenance and his secret, and answered, "John Rokesmith, my dear."

"Good boy! Who gave you that name?"

With a returning suspicion that something might have betrayed him to her, he answered, interrogatively, "My godfathers and my godmothers, dear love?"

"Pretty good!" said Bella. "Not goodest good, because you hesitate about it. However, as you know your Catechism fairly, so far, I'll let you off the rest. Now, I am going to examine you out of my own head. John, dear, why did you go back this evening, to the question you once asked me before—would I like to be rich?"

Again, his secret! He looked down at her as she looked up at him, with her hands folded on his knee, and it was as nearly told as ever secret was.

Having no reply ready, he could do no better than embrace her.

"In short, dear John, this is the topic of my lecture: I want nothing on earth, and I want you to believe it."

"If that's all, the lecture may be considered over, for I do."

"It's not all, John, dear," Bella hesitated. "It's only Firstly. There's a dreadful Secondly, and a dreadful Thirdly to come—as I used to say to myself in sermon-time when I was a very small-sized sinner at church."

"Let them come, my dearest."

"Are you sure, John dear; are you absolutely certain in your innermost heart of hearts, there is no remembrance that I was once very mercenary?"

"Why, if there were no remembrance in me of the time you speak of," he softly asked her with his lips to hers, "could I love you quite as well as I do; could I have in the Calendar of my life the brightest of its days; could I whenever I look at your dear face, or hear your dear voice, see and hear my noble champion? It can never have been that which made you serious, darling?"

"No, John, it wasn't that, and still less was it Mrs. Boffin, though I love her. Wait a moment, and I'll go on with the lecture. Give me a moment, because I like to cry for joy. It's so delicious, John dear, to cry for joy."

She did so on his neck, and, still clinging there, laughed a little when she said, "I think I am ready now for Thirdly, John."

"I am ready for Thirdly," said John, "whatever it is."

"I believe John," pursued Bella, "that you believe that I believe—"

"My dear child," cried her husband, gayly, "what a quantity of believing!"

"Isn't there?" said Bella, with another laugh. "I never knew such a quantity! It's like verbs in an exercise. But I can't get on with less believing. I'll try again. I believe, dear John, that you believe that I believe that we have as much money as we require, and that we want for nothing."

"It is strictly true, Bella."

"But if our money should by any means be rendered not so much—if we had to stint ourselves a little in purchases that we can afford to make now—would you still have the same confidence in my being quite contented, John?"

"Precisely the same confidence, my soul."

"Thank you, John dear, thousands upon thousands of times. And I may take it for granted, no doubt," with a little faltering, "that you would be quite as contented yourself, John? But, yes, I know I may. For, knowing that I should be so, how surely I may know that you would be so; you who are so much stronger, and firmer, and more reasonable and more generous, than I am."

"Hush!" said her husband, "I must not hear that. You are all wrong there, though otherwise as right as can be. And now I am brought to a little piece of news, my dearest, that I might have told you earlier in the evening. I have strong reason for confidently believing that we shall never be in the receipt of a smaller income than our present income."

She might have shown herself more interested in the intelligence; but she had returned to the investigation of the coat-button that had engaged her attention a few hours before, and scarcely seemed to heed what he said.

"And now we have got to the bottom of it at last," cried her husband, rallying her, "and this is the thing that made you serious?"

"No, dear," said Bella, twisting the button and shaking her head, "it wasn't this."

"Why then, Lord bless this little wife of mine, there's a Fourthly!" exclaimed John.

"This worried me a little, and so did Secondly," said Bella, occupied with the button, "but it was quite another sort of seriousness—a much deeper and quieter sort of seriousness—that I spoke of, John dear."

As he bent his face to hers, she raised hers to meet it, and laid her little right hand on his eyes, and kept it there.

"Do you remember, John, on the day we were married, Pa's speaking of the ships that might be sailing towards us from the unknown seas?"

"Perfectly, my darling!"

"I think among them there is a ship upon the ocean bringing to you and me a little baby, John."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE Paper Mill had stopped work for the night, and the paths and roads in its neighborhood were sprinkled with clusters of people going home from their day's labor.

It was Saturday evening, and there was a sort of little Fair in the village.

The various sounds arising from it, and floating away into the still air, made the evening, at any point which they just reached fitfully, mellowed by the distance, more still by contrast. Such was the stillness to Eugene Wrayburn, as he walked by the river with his hands behind him.

He walked slowly, and with the measured step and preoccupied air of one who was waiting. He walked between two points, an osier-bed at this end and some floating lilies at that, and at each point stopped and looked expectantly in one direction.

"It is very quiet," said he.

A rustle in a field beyond the hedge attracted his attention. "What's here to do?" he asked himself, leisurely going towards the gate and looking over. "No jealous paper-miller? No pleasures of the chase in this part of the country? Mostly fishing hereabouts!"

The field had been newly mown, and there were yet the marks of the scythe on the yellow-green ground, and the track of wheels where the hay had been carried. Following the tracks with his eyes, the view closed with the new hayrick in the corner.

Now, if he had gone on to the hayrick, and gone round it? But, say that the event was to be, as the event fell out, and how idle are such suppositions! Besides, if he had gone; what is there of warning in a bargeman lying on his face?

"A bird flying to the hedge," was all he thought about it; and came back, and resumed his walk.

"If I had not a reliance on her being truthful," said Eugene, after taking some half-dozen turns, "I should begin to think she had given me the slip for the second time. But she promised, and she is a girl of her word."

Turning again at the water-lilies, he saw her coming, and advanced to meet her.

"I was saying to myself, Lizzie, that you were sure to come, though you were late."

"I had to linger through the village as if I had no object before me, and I had to speak to several people in passing along, Mr. Wrayburn."

"Are the lads of the village—and the ladies—such scandal-mongers?" he asked, as he took her hand and drew it through his arm.

She submitted to walk slowly on, with downcast eyes. He put her hand to his lips, and she quietly drew it away.

"Will you walk beside me, Mr. Wrayburn, and not touch me?" For his arm was already stealing round her waist.

She stopped again, and gave him an earnest supplicating look. "Well, Lizzie, well!" said he, in an easy way, though ill at ease with himself, "don't be unhappy, don't be reproachful!"

"I cannot help being unhappy, but I do not mean to be reproachful. Mr. Wrayburn, I implore you to go away from this neighborhood, to-morrow morning."

"Lizzie, Lizzie, Lizzie!" he remonstrated. "As well be reproachful as wholly unreasonable. I can't go away."

"Why not?"

"Faith!" said Eugene in his airily candid manner. "Because you won't let me. Mind! I don't mean to be reproachful either. I don't complain that you design to keep me here. But you do it, you do it."

"Will you walk beside me, and not touch me," for his arm was coming about her again; "while I speak to you very seriously, Mr. Wrayburn?"

"I will do anything within the limits of possibility, for you, Lizzie," he answered with pleasant gayety as he folded his arms. "See here! Bonaparte at St. Helena."

"When you spoke to me as I came from the Mill, the night before last," said Lizzie, fixing her eyes upon him with the look of supplication which troubled his better nature, "you told me that you were much surprised to see me, and that you were on a fishing-excursion. Was it true?"

"It was not," replied Eugene, composedly, "in the least true. I came here, because I had information that I should find you here."

"Can you imagine why I left London, Mr. Wrayburn?"

"I am afraid, Lizzie, that you left London to get rid of me. It is not flattering to my self-love, but I am afraid you did."

"I did."

"How could you be so cruel?"

"O Mr. Wrayburn," she answered, suddenly breaking into tears, "is the cruelty on my side? O Mr. Wrayburn, is there no cruelty in your being here to-night?"

"In the name of all that's good—and that is not conjuring you in my own name, for Heaven knows I am not good"—said Eugene, "don't be distressed!"

"What else can I be, when I know the distance and the difference between us? What else can I be, when to tell me why you came here is to put me to shame?" said Lizzie, covering her face.

He looked at her with a real sentiment of remorseful tenderness and pity. It was not strong enough to impel him to sacrifice himself and spare her, but it was a strong emotion.

"Lizzie! I never thought before, that there was a woman in the world who could affect me so much by saying so little. But don't be hard in your construction of me. You

don't know what my state of mind towards you is. You don't know how you haunt me and bewilder me. You don't know how the cursed carelessness that is over-officious in helping me at every other turning of my life, won't help me here. You have struck it dead, I think, and I sometimes almost wish you had struck me dead along with it."

"It grieves you to see me distressed, Mr. Wrayburn; it grieves me to see you distressed. I don't reproach you. Indeed I don't reproach you. You have not felt this as I feel it, being so different from me, and beginning from another point of view. You have not thought. But I entreat you to think now, think now!"

"What am I to think of?" asked Eugene, bitterly.

"Think of me."

"Tell me how *not* to think of you, Lizzie, and you'll change me altogether."

"I don't mean in that way. Think of me, as belonging to another station, and quite cut off from you in honor. Remember that I have no protector near me, unless I have one in your noble heart. Respect my good name. If you feel toward me, in one particular, as you might if I was a lady, give me the full claims of a lady upon your generous behavior. I am removed from you and your family by being a working-girl. How true a gentleman to be as considerate of me as if I was removed by being a queen!"

His face expressed contrition and indecision as he asked:

"Have I injured you so much, Lizzie?"

"No, no. You may set me quite right. I don't speak of the past, Mr. Wrayburn, but of the present and the future. Are we not here now, because through two days you have followed me so closely where there are so many eyes to see you, that I consented to this appointment as an escape?"

"Again, not very flattering to my self-love," said Eugene, moodily; "but yes. Yes. Yes."

"Then I beseech you, Mr. Wrayburn, I beg and pray you, leave this neighborhood. If you do not, consider to what you will drive me."

He did consider within himself for a moment or two, and then retorted, "Drive you? To what shall I drive you?"

"You will drive me away. I live here peacefully and re-

spected, and I am well employed here. You will force me to quit this place as I quitted London, and—by following me again—will force me to quit the next place in which I may find refuge, as I quitted this.”

“Are you so determined, Lizzie—forgive the word I am going to use, for it’s literal truth—to fly from a lover?”

“I am so determined,” she answered, resolutely, though trembling, “to fly from such a lover. Mr. Wrayburn, if I believed—but I do not believe—that you could be so cruel to me as to drive me from place to place to wear me out, you should drive me to death and not do it.”

He looked full at her handsome face, and in his own handsome face there was a light of blended admiration, anger, and reproach, which she—who loved him so in secret—whose heart had long been so full, and he the cause of its overflowing—drooped before. She tried hard to retain her firmness, but he saw it melting away under his eyes. In the moment of its dissolution, and of his first full knowledge of his influence upon her, she dropped, and he caught her on his arm.

“Lizzie! Rest so a moment. Answer what I ask you. If I had not been what you call removed from you and cut off from you, would you have made this appeal to me to leave you?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know. Don’t ask me, Mr. Wrayburn. Let me go back.”

“I swear to you, Lizzie, you shall go directly. I swear to you, you shall go alone. I’ll not accompany you, I’ll not follow you, if you will reply.”

“How can I, Mr. Wrayburn? How can I tell you what I should have done, if you had not been what you are?”

“If I had not been what you make me out to be,” he struck in, skillfully changing the form of words, “would you still have hated me?”

“O Mr. Wrayburn,” she replied appealingly, and weeping, “you know me better than to think I do!”

“If I had not been what you make me out to be, Lizzie, would you still have been indifferent to me?”

“O Mr. Wrayburn,” she answered as before, “you know me better than that too!”

There was something in the attitude of her whole figure as he supported it, and she hung her head, which besought him to be merciful and not force her to disclose her heart. He was not merciful with her, and he made her do it.

"If I know you better than quite to believe (unfortunate dog though I am!) that you hate me, or even that you are wholly indifferent to me, Lizzie, let me know so much more from yourself before we separate. Let me know how you would have dealt with me if you had regarded me as being what you would have considered on equal terms with you."

"It is impossible, Mr. Wrayburn. How can I think of you as being on equal terms with me? If my mind could put you on equal terms with me, you could not be yourself. How could I remember, then, the night when I first saw you, and when I went out of the room because you looked at me so attentively? Or the night that passed into the morning when you broke to me that my father was dead? Or the nights when you used to come to see me at my next home? Or your having known how uninstructed I was, and having caused me to be taught better? Or my having so looked up to you and wondered at you, and at first thought you so good to be at all mindful of me?"

"Only 'at first' thought me so good, Lizzie? What did you think me after 'at first'? So bad?"

"I don't say that. I don't mean that. But after the first wonder and pleasure of being noticed by one so different from any one who had ever spoken to me, I began to feel that it might have been better if I had never seen you."

"Why?"

"Because you *were* so different," she answered in a lower voice. "Because it was so endless, so hopeless. Spare me!"

"Did you think for me at all, Lizzie?"

"Not much, Mr. Wrayburn. Not much until to-night."

"Will you tell me why?"

"I never supposed until to-night that you needed to be thought for. But if you do need to be; if you do truly feel at heart that you have indeed been towards me what you have called yourself to-night, and that there is nothing for us in this life but separation; then Heaven help you, and Heaven bless you!"

The purity with which in these words she expressed something of her own love and her own suffering, made a deep impression on him for the passing time. He held her, almost as if she were sanctified to him by death, and kissed her, once, almost as he might have kissed the dead.

"I promised that I would not accompany you, nor follow you. Shall I keep you in view? You have been agitated, and it's growing dark."

"I am used to be out alone at this hour, and I entreat you not to do so."

"I promise. I can bring myself to promise nothing more to-night, Lizzie, except that I will try what I can do."

"There is but one means, Mr. Wrayburn, of sparing yourself and of sparing me, every way. Leave this neighborhood to-morrow morning."

"I will try."

As he spoke the words in a grave voice, she put her hand in his, removed it, and went away by the river-side.

"Now, could Mortimer believe this?" murmured Eugene, still remaining, after awhile, where she had left him. "Can I even believe it myself?"

He referred to the circumstance that there were tears upon his hand, as he stood covering his eyes.

He strolled on, unconscious of his way. Looking above, he found that the young moon was up, and that the stars were beginning to shine in the sky from which the tones of red and yellow were flickering out, in favor of the calm blue of a summer night. He was still by the river-side. Turning suddenly, he met a man, so close upon him that Eugene, surprised, stepped back, to avoid a collision. The man carried something over his shoulder which might have been a broken oar, or spar, or bar, and took no notice of him, but passed on.

"Halloa, friend!" said Eugene, calling after him, "are you blind?"

The man made no reply, but went his way.

Eugene Wrayburn went the opposite way. He came within hearing of the village sounds, and came to the bridge. The inn where he stayed, like the village and the mill, was not across the river, but on that side of the stream on which

he walked. However, knowing the rushy bank and the backwater on the other side to be a retired place, and feeling out of humor for noise or company, he crossed the bridge, and sauntered on: looking up at the stars as they seemed one by one to be kindled in the sky, and looking down at the river as the same stars seemed to be kindled deep in the water. A landing-place overshadowed by a willow, and a pleasure-boat lying moored there among some stakes, caught his eye as he passed along. The spot was in such dark shadow, that he paused to make out what was there, and then passed on again.

The rippling of the river seemed to cause a correspondent stir in his uneasy reflections. He would have laid them asleep if he could, but they were in movement, like the stream, and all tending one way with a strong current. As the ripple under the moon broke unexpectedly now and then, and palely flashed in a new shape and with a new sound, so parts of his thoughts started, unbidden, from the rest, and revealed their wickedness. "Out of the question to marry her," said Eugene, "and out of the question to leave her. The crisis!"

He had sauntered far enough. Before turning to retrace his steps, he stopped upon the margin, to look down at the reflected night. In an instant, with a dreadful crash, the reflected night turned crooked, flames shot jaggedly across the air, and the moon and stars came bursting from the sky.

Was he struck by lightning? With some incoherent half-formed thought to that effect, he turned under the blows that were blinding him and mashing his life, and closed with a murderer, whom he caught by a red neckerchief—unless the raining down of his own blood gave it that hue.

Eugene was light, active, and expert; but his arms were broken, or he was paralyzed, and could do no more than hang on to the man, with his head swung back, so that he could see nothing but the heaving sky. After dragging at the assailant, he fell on the bank with him, and then there was another great crash, and then a splash, and all was done.

Lizzie Hexam, too, had avoided the noise, and the Saturday movement of people in the straggling street, and chose

to walk alone by the water until her tears should be dry, and she could so compose herself as to escape remark upon her looking ill or unhappy on going home. The peaceful serenity of the hour and place, having no reproaches or evil intentions within her breast to contend against, sank healingly into its depths. She had meditated and taken comfort. She, too, was turning homeward, when she heard a strange sound.

It startled her, for it was like a sound of blows. She stood still, and listened. It sickened her, for blows fell heavily and cruelly on the quiet of the night. As she listened, undecided, all was silent. As she yet listened, she heard a faint groan, and a fall into the river.

Her old bold life and habit instantly inspired her. Without vain waste of breath in crying for help where there were none to hear, she ran towards the spot from which the sounds had come. It lay between her and the bridge, but it was more removed from her than she had thought; the night being so very quiet, and sound traveling far with the help of water.

At length, she reached a part of the green bank, much and newly trodden, where lay some broken splintered pieces of wood and torn fragments of clothes. Stooping, she saw that the grass was bloody. Following the drops and smears, she saw that the watery margin of the bank was bloody. Following the current with her eyes, she saw a bloody face turned up towards the moon, and drifting away.

Now, merciful Heaven be thanked for that old time, and grant, O Blessed Lord, that through thy wonderful workings it may turn to good at last! To whomsoever the drifting face belongs, be it man's or woman's, help my humble hands, Lord God, to raise it from death and restore it to some one to whom it must be dear!

It was thought, fervently thought, but not for a moment did the prayer check her. She was away before it welled up in her mind, away, swift and true, yet steady above all—for without steadiness it could never be done—to the landing place under the willow tree, where she also had seen a boat lying moored among the stakes.

A sure touch of her old practiced hand, a sure step of her

old practiced foot, a sure light balance of her body, and she was in the boat. A quick glance of her practiced eye showed her, even through the deep dark shadow, the sculls in a rack against the red-brick garden-wall. Another moment, and she had cast off (taking the line with her), and the boat had shot out into the moonlight and she was rowing down the stream as never other woman rowed on English water.

Intently over her shoulder, without slackening speed, she looked ahead for the driving face. She passed the scene of the struggle—yonder it was, on her left, well over the boat's stern—she passed on her right, the end of the village street, a hilly street that almost dipped into the river; its sounds were growing faint again, and she slackened; looking as the boat drove, everywhere, everywhere, for the floating face.

She merely kept the boat before the stream now, and rested on her oars, knowing well that if the face were not soon visible, it had gone down, and she would overshoot it. An untrained sight would never have seen by the moonlight what she saw at the length of a few strokes astern. She saw the drowning figure rise to the surface, slightly struggle, and as if by instinct turn over on its back to float. Just so had she first dimly seen the face which she now dimly saw again.

Firm of look and firm of purpose, she intently watched its coming on, until it was very near; then, with a touch unshipped her sculls, and crept aft in the boat, between kneeling and crouching. Once, she let the body evade her, not being sure of her grasp. Twice, and she had seized it by its bloody hair.

It was insensible, if not virtually dead; it was mutilated, and streaked the water all about it with dark red streaks. As it could not help itself, it was impossible for her to get it on board. She bent over the stern to secure it with the line, and then the river and its shores rang to the terrible cry she uttered.

But, as if possessed by supernatural spirit and strength, she lashed it safe, resumed her seat, and rowed in, desperately, for the nearest shallow water where she might run the boat aground. Desperately, but not wildly, for she knew that if she lost distinctness of intention, all was lost and gone.

She ran the boat ashore, went into the water, released him from the line, and by main strength lifted him in her arms and laid him in the bottom of the boat. He had fearful wounds upon him, and she bound them up with her dress torn into strips. Else, supposing him to be still alive, she foresaw that he must bleed to death before he could be landed at his inn, which was the nearest place for succor.

This done very rapidly, she kissed his disfigured forehead, looked up in anguish to the stars, and blessed him and forgave him, "if she had anything to forgive." It was only in that instant that she thought of herself, and then she thought of herself only for him.

Now, merciful Heaven be thanked for that old time, enabling me, without a wasted moment, to have got the boat afloat again, and to row back against the stream! And grant, O Blessed Lord God, that through poor me he may be raised from death, and preserved to some one else to whom he may be dear one day, though never dearer than to me!

She rowed hard—rowed desperately, but never wildly—and seldom removed her eyes from him in the bottom of the boat. She had so laid him there, as that she might see his disfigured face; it was so much disfigured that his mother might have covered it, but it was above and beyond disfigurement in her eyes.

The boat touched the edge of the patch of inn lawn, sloping gently to the water. There were lights in the windows, but there chanced to be no one out-of-doors. She made the boat fast, and again by main strength took him up, and never laid him down until she laid him down in the house.

Surgeons were sent for, and she sat supporting his head. She had oftentimes heard in days that were gone, how doctors would lift the hand of an insensible wounded person, and would drop it if the person were dead. She waited for the awful moment when the doctors might lift this hand, all broken and bruised, and let it fall.

The first of the surgeons came, and asked, before proceeding to his examination, "Who brought him in?"

"I brought him in, sir," answered Lizzie.

"You, my dear? You could not lift, far less carry, this weight."

"I think I could not, at another time, sir ; but I am sure I did."

The surgeon looked at her with great attention, and with some compassion. Having with a grave face touched the wounds upon the head, and the broken arms, he took the hand.

O ! would he let it drop ?

He appeared irresolute. He did not retain it, but laid it gently down, took a candle, looked more closely at the injuries on the head, and at the pupils of the eyes. That done, he replaced the candle and took the hand again. Another surgeon then coming in, the two exchanged a whisper, and the second took the hand. Neither did he let it fall at once, but kept it for a while and laid it gently down.

"Attend to the poor girl," said the first surgeon then. "She is quite unconscious. She sees nothing and hears nothing. All the better for her ! Don't rouse her, if you can help it ; only move her. Poor girl, poor girl ! She must be amazingly strong of heart, but it is much to be feared that she has set her heart upon the dead. Be gentle with her."

CHAPTER XLIX.

DAY was breaking at Plashwater Weir Mill Lock. This earth looked spectral, and so did the pale stars : while the cold eastern glare, expressionless as to heat or color, with the eye of the firmament quenched, might have been likened to the stare of the dead.

Perhaps it was so likened by the lonely bargeman, standing on the brink of the lock. For certain, Bradley Headstone looked that way, when a chill air came up, and when it passed on murmuring, as if it whispered something that made the phantom trees and water tremble—or threaten—for fancy might have made it either.

He turned away, and tried the lock-house door. It was fastened on the inside.

"Is he afraid of me ?" he muttered, knocking.

Rogue Riderhood was soon roused, and soon undrew the bolt and let him in.

"Why, T'otherest, I thought you had been and got lost !

Two nights away! I a'most believed as you'd giv' me the slip, and I had as good as half a mind for to advertise you in the newspapers to come for'ard."

Very remarkably, Riderhood put no question to him. He had looked at him on opening the door, and he now looked at him again (stealthily this time), and the result of his looking was, that he asked him no question.

"You'll be for another forty on 'em, governor, as I judges, afore you turns your mind to breakfast," said Riderhood.

"Yes. I had better sleep, I think," said Bradley.

"I myself should recommend it, governor," assented Riderhood. "Might you be anyways dry?"

"Yes. I should like a drink," said Bradley.

Mr. Riderhood got out his bottle, and fetched his jug-full of water, and administered a potation. Then he shook the coverlet of his bed and spread it smooth, and Bradley stretched himself upon it in the clothes he wore. Mr. Riderhood, poetically remarking that he would pick the bones of his night's rest, in his wooden chair, sat in the window as before; but, as before, watched the sleeper narrowly until he was very sound asleep. Then he rose and looked at him close, in the bright daylight, on every side with great minuteness. He went out to his lock to sum up what he had seen.

"One of his sleeves is tore right away below the elber, and the t'other had a good rip at the shoulder. He's been hung on to, pretty tight, for his shirt's all tore out of the neck gathers. He's been in the grass, and he's been in the water. And he's spotted, and I know with what and with whose. Hooroar."

Bradley slept long. Early in the afternoon a barge came down. Other barges had passed through, both ways, before it; but the lock-keeper hailed only this particular barge, for news, as if he had made a time calculation with some nicety. The men on board told him a piece of news, and there was a lingering on their part to enlarge upon it.

Twelve hours had intervened since Bradley's lying down, when he got up. "Not that I swaller it," said Riderhood, squinting at his lock, when he saw Bradley coming out of the house, "as you've been a-sleeping all the time, old boy!"

Bradley came to him, sitting on his wooden lever, and asked what o'clock it was? Riderhood told him it was between two and three.

"When are you relieved?" asked Bradley.

"Day arter to-morrow, governor."

"Not sooner?"

"Not a inch sooner, governor."

On both sides, importance seemed attached to this question of relief. Riderhood quite petted his reply; saying a second time, and prolonging a negative roll of his head, "n—n—not a inch sooner, governor."

"Did I tell you I was going on to-night?" asked Bradley.

"No, governor," returned Riderhood, in a cheerful, affable, and conversational manner, "you did not tell me so. But most like you meant to it and forgot to it. How, other-ways, could a doubt have come into your head about it, governor?"

"As the sun goes down, I intend to go on," said Bradley.

"So much the more necessary is a Peck," returned Riderhood. "Come in and have it, T'otherest."

The serving of the "peck" was the affair of a moment; it consisting in the handing down of a capacious baking dish with three-fourths of an immense meat pie in it, and the production of two pocket-knives, an earthenware mug, and a large brown bottle of beer.

Bradley Headstone was so remarkably awkward that the Rogue observed it.

"Look out, T'otherest! you'll cut your hand!"

But, the caution came too late, for Bradley gashed it at the instant. And, what was more unlucky, in asking Riderhood to tie it up, and in standing close to him for the purpose, he shook his hand under the smart of the wound, and shook blood over Riderhood's dress.

Riderhood looked at Bradley, and with an evil eye.

"T'otherest!" he said, hoarsely, as he bent across the table to touch his arm. "The news has gone down the river afore you."

"What news?"

"Who do you think," said Riderhood, with a hitch of his head, as if he disdainfully jerked the feint away, "picked up the body? Guess."

"I am not good at guessing anything."

"She did. Hooroar! You had him there agin. She did."

The convulsive twitching of Bradley Headstone's face, and the sudden hot humor that broke out upon it, showed how grimly the intelligence touched him.

"I have been so long in want of rest," said he, "that with your leave I'll lie down again."

"And welcome, T'otherest!" was the hospitable answer of his host. He had laid himself down without waiting for it, and he remained upon the bed until the sun was low. When he arose and came out to resume his journey, he found his host waiting for him on the grass by the towing-path outside the door.

"Whenever it may be necessary that you and I should have any further communication together," said Bradley, "I will come back. Good-night!"

"Well, since no better can be," said Riderhood, turning on his heel, "Good-night!" But he turned again as the other set forth, and added under his breath, looking after him with a leer: "You wouldn't be let to go like that, if my Relief warn't as good as come. I'll catch you up in a mile."

His real time of relief being that evening at sunset, his mate came lounging in, within a quarter of an hour, and Riderhood straightway followed on the track of Bradley Headstone.

He was a better follower than Bradley. It had been the calling of his life to slink and skulk and dog and waylay, and he knew his calling well. His man looked back pretty often as he went, but got no hint of him. *He* knew a thousand arts beyond the doomed Bradley's slow conception.

But all his arts were brought to a stand-still, like himself, when Bradley, turning into a green lane by the river-side—a solitary spot run wild in nettles, briars, and brambles, and encumbered with the scathed trunks of a whole hedgerow of felled trees, on the outskirts of a little wood—began stepping on these trunks and dropping down among them and stepping on them again, apparently as a school-boy might have done, but assuredly with no school-boy purpose, or want of purpose.

"What are you up to?" muttered Riderhood, down in the ditch, and holding the hedge a little open with both hands. "By George and the Draggin! if he ain't a-going to bathe!"

Rogue Riderhood watched the bather dressing. And now gradually came the wonder that he stood up, completely clothed, another man, and not the bargeman.

"Aha!" said Riderhood. "Much as you was dressed that night. I see. You're a taking me with you, now. You're deep. But I knows a deeper."

When the bather had finished dressing, he kneeled on the grass, doing something with his hands, and again stood up with his bundle under his arm. Looking all around him with great attention, he then went to the river's edge, and flung it in as far, and yet as lightly as he could. It was not until he was so decidedly upon his way again as to be beyond a bend of the river and for the time out of view, that Riderhood scrambled from the ditch.

"Now," was his debate with himself, "shall I foller you on, or shall I let you loose for this once, and go a-fishing? I'll let you loose this once, and go a-fishing!" With that, he suddenly dropped the pursuit and turned.

The miserable man whom he had released for the time, but not for long, went on towards London.

The school re-opened next day. The scholars saw little or no change in their master's face, for it always wore its slowly laboring expression. But, as he heard his classes, he was always doing the deed and doing it better. As he paused with his piece of chalk at the blackboard before writing on it, he was thinking of the spot, and whether the water was not deeper and the fall straighter, a little higher up, or a little lower down. He had half a mind to draw a line or two upon the board, and show himself what he meant. He was doing it again and improving on the manner, at prayers, in his mental arithmetic, all through his questioning, all through the day.

Charley Hexam was a master now, in another school under another head. It was evening, and Bradley was walking in his garden observed from behind a blind by gentle little Miss Peecher, who contemplated offering him a

loan of her smelling salts for headache, when Mary Anne, in faithful attendance, ma'am, held up her arm.

"Yes, Mary Anne?"

"Young Mr. Hexam, if you please, ma'am, coming to see Mr. Headstone."

"Very good, Mary Anne."

Again Mary Anne held up her arm.

"You may speak, Mary Anne."

"Mr. Headstone has beckoned young Mr. Hexam into his house, ma'am, and he has gone in himself without waiting for young Mr. Hexam to come up, and now *he* has gone in too, ma'am, and has shut the door."

"With all my heart, Mary Anne."

Again Mary Anne's telegraphic arm worked.

"What more, Mary Anne?"

"They must find it rather dull and dark, Miss Peecher, for the parlor blind's down, and neither of them pulls it up."

"There is no accounting for tastes, Mary Anne."

Charley, entering the dark room, stopped short when he saw his old friend in its yellow shade.

"Come in, Hexam, come in."

Charley advanced to take the hand that was held out to him; but stopped again, short of it. The heavy, bloodshot eyes of the schoolmaster, rising to his face with an effort, met his look of scrutiny.

"Mr. Headstone, what's the matter?"

"Matter? Where?"

"Mr. Headstone, have you heard the news? About the fellow, Mr. Eugene Wrayburn? That he is killed?"

"He is dead, then?" exclaimed Bradley.

Young Hexam standing looking at him, he moistened his lips with his tongue, looked about the room, glanced at his former pupil, and looked down. "I heard of the outrage," said Bradley, trying to constrain his working mouth, "but I had not heard the end of it."

"Where were you," said the boy, advancing a step as he lowered his voice, "when it was done? Stop! I don't ask that. Don't tell me. If you force your confidence upon me, Mr. Headstone, I'll give up every word of it. Mind! Take notice. I'll give up it, and I'll give up you. I will!"

The wretched creature seemed to suffer acutely under this renunciation. A desolate air of utter and complete loneliness fell upon him, like a visible shade.

"It's for me to speak, not you," said the boy. "If you do, you'll do it at your peril. I am going to put your selfishness before you, Mr. Headstone—your passionate, violent, and ungovernable selfishness—to show you why I can, and why I will, have nothing more to do with you. If you had any part—I don't say what—in this attack," pursued the boy; "or if you know anything about it—I don't say how much—or if you know who did it—I go no closer—you did an injury to me that's never to be forgiven. You know that I took you with me to his chambers in the Temple when I told him my opinion of him, and made myself responsible for my opinion of you. You know that I took you with me when I was watching him with a view to recovering my sister and bringing her to her senses; you know that I have allowed myself to be mixed up with you, all through this business, in favoring your desire to marry my sister. And how do you know that, pursuing the ends of your own violent temper, you have not laid me open to suspicion? Is *that* your gratitude to me, Mr. Headstone? When I speak of my sister, I devoutly wish that you had never seen her, Mr. Headstone. I explained her character to you, and how she interposed some ridiculous fanciful notions in the way of our being as respectable as I tried for. You fell in love with her, and I favored you, with all my might. She could not be induced to favor you, and so we came into collision with this Mr. Eugene Wrayburn. Now, what have you done? Why, you have justified my sister in being firmly set against you from first to last, and you have put me in the wrong again! It is," he went on, actually with tears, "an extraordinary circumstance attendant on my life, that every effort I make towards perfect respectability, is impeded by somebody else through no fault of mine! Not content with doing what I have put before you, you will drag my name into notoriety through dragging my sister's—which you are pretty sure to do, if my suspicions have any foundation at all—and the worse you prove to be, the harder it will be for me to detach myself from being associated with you in

people's minds. However, I have made up my mind that I will become respectable in the scale of society, and that I will not be dragged down by others. I have done with my sister as well as with you."

CHAPTER L.

ON a certain day, Miss Wren was alone at her work, with the house-door set open for coolness, and was trolling in a small sweet voice a mournful little song which might have been the song of the doll she was dressing, bemoaning the brittleness and meltability of wax, when whom should she descry standing on the pavement, looking in at her, but Mr. Fledgeby.

"I thought it was you!" said Fledgeby, coming up the two steps.

"Did you?" Miss Wren retorted. "And I thought it was you, young man. Quite a coincidence. You're not mistaken, and I'm not mistaken. How clever we are!"

"Well, and how are you?" said Fledgeby.

"I am pretty much as usual, sir," replied Miss Wren. "To what am I to attribute the honor and favor?"

"To a wish to improve your acquaintance," Mr. Fledgeby replied.

Miss Wren, stopping to bite her thread, looked at him very knowingly.

"We never meet now," said Fledgeby; "do we?"

"No," said Miss Wren, chopping off the word.

"So I had a mind," pursued Fledgeby, "to come and have a talk with you about our dodging friend, the child of Israel."

"So *he* gave you my address; did he?" asked Miss Wren.

"I got it out of him," said Fledgeby, with a stammer. "He's the dodgerest of the dodgers. What's he up to in the case of your friend the handsome gal? He must have some object. What's his object?"

"Cannot undertake to say, sir, I am sure!"

"He won't acknowledge where she's gone," said Fledgeby; "and I have a fancy that I should like to have another look at her. Now I know he knows where she is gone."

"Cannot undertake to say, sir, I am sure!"

"And you know where she is gone," hazarded Fledgeby.

"Cannot undertake to say, sir, really."

At a loss how to resume his fascinating part in the dialogue, at length he said:

"Miss Jenny!—That's your name, if I don't mistake?"

"Probably you don't mistake, sir," was Miss Wren's cool answer; "because you had it on the best authority. Mine, you know."

"Look here," said Fledgeby, "I take it for granted, that to get the most of your materials for nothing would be well worth your while, Miss Jenny?"

"You may take it for granted," returned the dressmaker with many knowing nods, "that it's always well worth my while to make money."

"Now," said Fledgeby, approvingly, "you're answering to a sensible purpose. Now, you're coming out and looking alive! So I make so free, Miss Jenny, as to offer the remark, that you and Judah were too thick together to last. You can't come to be intimate with such a deep file as Judah without beginning to see a little way into him, you know."

"I must own," returned the dressmaker, with her eyes upon her work, "that we are not good friends at present."

"I know you're not good friends at present," said Fledgeby. "I know all about it. I should like to pay off Judah, by not letting him have his own deep way in everything. I should be glad to countermine him, respecting the handsome gal, your friend. He means something there. You may depend upon it, Judah means something there. He has a motive, and of course his motive is a dark motive. Now, whatever his motive is, it's necessary to his motive"—Mr. Fledgeby's constructive powers were not equal to the avoidance of some tautology here—"that it should be kept from me, what he has done with her. So I put it to you, who know: What *has* he done with her? I ask no more. And is that asking much, when you understand that it will pay?"

"Where d'ye live?"

"Albany, Picadilly," replied Fledgeby.

"When are you at home?"

"When you like."

"Breakfast-time?" said Jenny, in her abruptest and shortest manner.

"No better time in the day," said Fledgeby.

"I'll look in upon you to-morrow, young man. Mark you! I promise you nothing," said the dolls' dressmaker, dabbing two dabs at him with her needle, as if she put out both his eyes.

"No, no. *I* understand," returned Fledgeby. "The damage and waste question shall be settled first. It shall be made to pay. Good-day, Miss Jenny."

"Good-day, young man."

The dolls' dressmaker was on the alert next morning, and drove to Bond Street, and set down two ladies punctually, and then directed her equipage, as she quaintly called her crutch-stick, to conduct her to the Albany. Arrived at the door-way of the house in which Mr. Fledgeby's chambers were, she found a lady standing there in a traveling dress, holding in her hand—of all things in the world—a gentleman's hat.

"You want some one?" said the lady in a stern manner.

"I am going up-stairs to Mr. Fledgeby's."

"You cannot do that at this moment. There is a gentleman with him."

While speaking, and afterwards, the lady kept watchfully between her and the staircase, as if prepared to oppose her going up, by force. The lady being of a stature to stop her with a hand, and looking mightily determined, the dressmaker stood still.

"Well? Why do you listen?" asked the lady.

"I am not listening," said the dressmaker.

"What do you hear?" asked the lady.

"Is it a kind of spluttering somewhere?" said the dressmaker, with an inquiring look.

"Mr. Fledgeby in his shower-bath, perhaps," remarked the lady, smiling.

"And somebody's beating a carpet, I think."

"Mr. Fledgeby's carpet, I dare say," replied the smiling lady.

"I hope there's nothing the matter!" said the dressmaker.

"Where?" inquired the lady.

"I don't know where," said Miss Wren, staring about her. "But I never heard such odd noises. Don't you think I had better call somebody?"

"I think you had better not," returned the lady, with a significant frown, and drawing closer.

Soon afterwards, came a slamming and banging of doors; and then came running down-stairs a gentleman with whiskers, and out of breath, who seemed to be red-hot.

"Is your business done, Alfred?" inquired the lady.

"Very thoroughly done," replied the gentleman, as he took his hat from her.

"You can go up to Mr. Fledgeby as soon as you like," said the lady, moving haughtily away.

"Oh! And you can take these three pieces of stick with you," added the gentleman, politely, "and say, if you please, that they come from Mr. Alfred Lammle, with his compliments on leaving England. Mr. Alfred Lammle. Be so good as not to forget the name."

The three pieces of stick were three broken and frayed fragments of a stout lithe cane.

With a gleam of new intelligence in her sharp face, the dolls' dressmaker pulled at Fledgeby's bell. No one answered; but from within the chambers proceeded a continuous spluttering sound of a highly singular and unintelligible nature.

"Good gracious! Is Little Eyes choking?" cried Miss Jenny.

Pulling at the bell again and getting no reply, she pushed the outer door, and found it standing ajar. No one being visible on her opening it wider, and the spluttering continuing, she took the liberty of opening an inner door, and then beheld the extraordinary spectacle of Mr. Fledgeby in a shirt, a pair of Turkish trousers, and a Turkish cap, rolling over and over on his own carpet, and spluttering wonderfully.

"Oh Lord!" gasped Mr. Fledgeby. "Oh my eye! Stop thief! I am strangling. Fire! Oh my eye! Give me a glass of water. Shut the door. Murder! Oh Lord!" And then rolled and spluttered more than ever.

Hurrying into another room, Miss Jenny got a glass of water, and brought it for Fledgeby's relief: who, gasping, spluttering, and rattling in his throat between whiles, drank some water, and laid his head faintly on her arm.

"Oh my eye!" cried Fledgeby, struggling anew. "It's salt and snuff. It's up my nose, and down my throat, and in my windpipe. Ugh! Ow! Ow! Ow! Ah—h—h—h!" And here, crowing fearfully, with his eyes starting out of his head, he appeared to be contending with every mortal disease incidental to poultry.

"And Oh my Eye, I'm so sore!" cried Fledgeby, starting over on his back, in a spasmodic way that caused the dressmaker to retreat to the wall. "Oh I smart so! Do put something to my back and arms, and legs and shoulders. Ugh! It's down my throat again and can't come up. Ow! Ow! Ow! Ah—h—h—h! Oh! I smart so!" Here Mr. Fledgeby bounded up, and bounded down, and went rolling over and over again.

The dolls' dressmaker looked on until he rolled himself into a corner with his Turkish slippers uppermost, and then, resolving in the first place to address her ministration to the salt and snuff, gave him more water and slapped his back. But the latter application was by no means a success, causing Mr. Fledgeby to scream, and to cry out, "Oh my eye! don't slap me! I'm covered with weales and I smart so!"

However, he gradually ceased to choke and crow, saving at intervals, and Miss Jenny got him into an easy-chair: where, with his eyes red and watery, with his features swollen, and with some half-dozen livid bars across his face, he presented a most rueful sight.

"Shall I go for the police?" inquired Miss Jenny, with a nimble start towards the door.

"Stop! No, don't!" cried Fledgeby. "Don't, please. We had better keep it quiet. Will you be so good as shut the door? Oh I do smart so!"

In testimony of the extent to which he smarted Mr. Fledgeby came wallowing out of the easy-chair, and took another roll on the carpet.

"Now, the door's shut," said Mr. Fledgeby, sitting up in anguish, with his Turkish cap half on and half off, and the

bars on his face getting bluer, "do me the kindness to look at my back and shoulders. They must be in an awful state, for I hadn't got my dressing-gown on, when the brute came rushing in. Cut my shirt away from the collar; there's a pair of scissors on that table. Oh!" he groaned, with his hand to his head again. "How I do smart, to be sure!"

"There?" inquired Miss Jenny, alluding to the back and shoulders.

"Oh Lord, yes!" moaned Fledgeby, rocking himself. "And all over! Everywhere!"

The busy little dressmaker quickly snipped the shirt away, and laid bare the results of as furious and sound a thrashing as ever Mr. Fledgeby merited. "You may well smart, young man!" exclaimed Miss Jenny. And stealthily rubbed her little hands behind him, and poked a few exultant pokes with her two forefingers over the crown of his head.

"What do you think of vinegar and brown paper?" inquired the suffering Fledgeby, still rocking and moaning. "Does it look as if vinegar and brown paper was the sort of application?"

"Yes," said Miss Jenny, with a silent chuckle. "It looks as if it ought to be pickled."

Mr. Fledgeby collapsed under the word "pickled," and groaned again. "My kitchen is on this floor," he said; "You'll find brown paper in a dresser-drawer there, and a bottle of vinegar on a shelf. Would you have the kindness to make a few plasters and put 'em on? It can't be kept too quiet."

"One, two—hum—five, six. You'll want six," said the dressmaker.

"There's smart enough," whimpered Mr. Fledgeby, groaning and writhing again, "for sixty."

Miss Jenny repaired to the kitchen, scissors in hand, found the brown paper and found the vinegar, and skillfully cut out and steeped six large plasters. When they were all lying ready on the dresser, an idea occurred to her as she was about to gather them up.

"I think," said Miss Jenny, with a silent laugh, "he ought to have a little pepper? Just a few grains? I think the

young man's tricks and manners make a claim upon his friends for a little pepper?"

Mr. Fledgeby's evil star showing her the pepper-box on the chimney-piece, she climbed upon a chair, and got it down, and sprinkled all the plasters with a judicious hand. She then went back to Mr. Fledgeby, and stuck them all on him: Mr. Fledgeby uttering a sharp howl as each was put in its place.

"There, young man!" said the dolls' dressmaker. "Now I hope you feel pretty comfortable?"

Apparently, Mr. Fledgeby did not, for he cried by way of answer, "Oh—h how I do smart!"

Miss Jenny got his Persian gown upon him, extinguished his eyes crookedly with his Persian cap, and helped him to his bed: upon which he climbed groaning. "Business between you and me being out of the question to-day, young man, and my time being precious," said Miss Jenny then, "I'll make myself scarce. Are you comfortable now?"

"Oh my eye!" cried Mr. Fledgeby. "No, I ain't. Oh—h—h! how I do smart!"

The last thing Miss Jenny saw, as she looked back before closing the room door, was Mr. Fledgeby in the act of plunging and gamboling all over his bed, like a porpoise or dolphin in its native element.

CHAPTER LI.

SET down by an omnibus at the corner of Saint Mary Axe, and trusting to her feet and her crutch-stick within its precincts, the dolls' dressmaker proceeded to the place of business of Pubsey and Co. All there was sunny and quiet externally, and shady and quiet internally. Hiding herself in the entry outside the glass-door, she could see from that post of observation the old man in his spectacles sitting writing at his desk.

"Boh!" cried the dressmaker, popping in her head at the glass-door. "Mr. Wolf at home?"

The old man took his glasses off, and mildly laid them down beside him. "Ah, Jenny, is it you? I thought you had given me up."

"And so I had given up the treacherous wolf of the forest," she replied; "but, godmother, it strikes me you have come back. I am not quite sure, because the wolf and you change forms. I want to ask you a question or two, whether you are godmother or really wolf. May I?"

"Yes, Jenny, yes." But Riah glanced towards the door, as if he thought his principal might appear there.

"If you're afraid of the fox," said Miss Jenny, "you may dismiss all present expectations of seeing that animal. *He* won't show himself abroad for many a day."

"What do you mean, my child?"

"I mean, godmother," replied Miss Wren, sitting down beside the Jew, "that the fox has caught a famous flogging, and that if his skin and bones are not tingling, aching, and smarting at this present instant, no fox did ever tingle, ache, and smart." Therewith Miss Jenny related what had come to pass in the Albany, omitting the few grains of pepper.

"Now, godmother," she went on, "I particularly wish to ask you what has taken place here, since I left the wolf here? Because I have an idea about the size of a marble, rolling about in my little noddle. First and foremost, are you Pubsey and Co., or are you either? Upon your solemn word and honor."

The old man shook his head.

"Secondly, isn't Fledgeby both Pubsey and Co?"

The old man answered with a reluctant nod.

"My idea," exclaimed Miss Wren, "is now about the size of an orange, but before it gets any bigger, welcome back, dear godmother!"

The little creature folded her arms about the old man's neck with great earnestness, and kissed him. "I humbly beg your forgiveness, godmother. I am truly sorry. I ought to have had more faith in you. But what could I suppose when you said nothing for yourself, you know? I don't mean to offer that as a justification, but what could I suppose, when you were a silent party to all he said? It did look bad; now didn't it?"

"It looked bad, Jenny," responded the old man, with gravity. "But, my dear, I promised that you should pursue your questions."

"So you gave notice that you were going? Does that come next?" asked Miss Jenny.

"I indited a letter to my master. Yes. To that effect."

"And what said Tingling-Tossing-Aching-Screaming-Scratching-Smarter?" asked Miss Wren, with an unspeakable enjoyment in the utterance of those honorable titles and in the recollection of the pepper.

"He held me to certain months of servitude, which were his lawful term of notice. They expire to-morrow. Upon their expiration—not before—I had meant to set myself right with my Cinderella."

"My idea is getting so immense now," cried Miss Wren, clasping her temples, "that my head won't hold it! Little Eyes (that's Screaming-Scratching-Smarter) owes you a heavy grudge for going. Little Eyes casts about how best to pay you off. Little Eyes thinks of Lizzie. Little Eyes says to himself, 'I'll find out where he has placed that girl, and I'll betray his secret because it's dear to him.' Perhaps Little Eyes thinks, 'I'll make love to her myself too;' but that I can't swear—all the rest I can. So, Little Eyes comes to me, and I go to Little Eyes. That's the way of it. And now the murder's all out, I'm sorry that I didn't give him Cayenne pepper and chopped pickled Capsicum!"

A shadow darkened the entry, and the glass-door was opened by a messenger who brought a letter unceremoniously addressed, "Riah." To which he said there was an answer wanted.

The letter, which was scrawled in pencil uphill and downhill and round crooked corners, ran thus:

"OLD RIAH,

"Your accounts being all squared, go. Shut up the place, turn out directly, and send me the key by bearer. Go. You are an unthankful dog of a Jew. Get out.

"F."

The old man got his few goods together in a black bag. That done, the shutters of the upper windows closed, and the office blind pulled down, they issued forth upon the steps with the attendant messenger. There, while Miss Jenny held the bag, the old man locked the house-door, and handed over the key to him; who at once retired with the same.

"Well, godmother," said Miss Wren, as they remained upon the steps together, looking at one another. "And so you're thrown upon the world!"

"It would appear so, Jenny, and somewhat suddenly."

"Where are you going to seek your fortune?"

The old man smiled, but looked about him with a look of having lost his way in life, which did not escape the dolls' dressmaker.

"The best thing you can do," said Jenny, "for the time being, at all events, is to come home with me, godmother. Nobody's there but my bad child, and Lizzie's lodging stands empty." The old man, when satisfied that no inconvenience could be entailed on any one by his compliance, readily complied; and the singularly-assorted couple once more went through the streets together.

Now, the bad child having been strictly charged by his parent to remain at home in her absence, of course went out; and, being in the very last stage of mental decrepitude, went out with two objects; first, to establish a claim he conceived himself to have upon any licensed victualer living, to be supplied with threepennyworth of rum for nothing; and secondly, to bestow some maudlin remorse on Mr. Eugene Wrayburn, and see what profit came of it.

There was nobody at the Chambers but Young Blight. That discreet youth, sensible of a certain incongruity in the association of such a client with the business that might be coming some day, with the best intentions temporized with Dolls, and offered a shilling for coach-hire home. Mr. Dolls, accepting the shilling, promptly laid it out in two threepennyworths of conspiracy against his life, and two threepennyworths of raging repentance. Returning to the Chambers with which burden, he was descried coming round into the court, by the wary Young Blight watching from the window, who instantly closed the outer door, and left the miserable object to expend his fury on the panels.

The more the door resisted him, the more dangerous and imminent became that bloody conspiracy against his life. Force of police arriving, he recognized in them the conspirators, and laid about him hoarsely, fiercely, staringly, convulsively, foamingly. A humble machine, familiar to the

conspirators and called by the expressive name of Stretcher, being unavoidably sent for, he was rendered a harmless bundle of torn rags by being strapped down upon it, with voice and consciousness gone out of him, and life fast going. As this machine was borne out at the Temple gate by four men, the poor little dolls' dressmaker and her Jewish friend were coming up the street.

"Let us see what it is," cried the dressmaker. "Let us make haste and look, godmother."

The brisk little crutch-stick was but too brisk. "O gentlemen, gentlemen, he belongs to me!"

"Belongs to you?" said the head of the party, stopping it.

"O yes, dear gentlemen, he's my child, out without leave. My poor bad, bad boy! and he don't know me, he don't know me! O what shall I do," cried the little creature, wildly beating her hands together, "when my own child don't know me!"

The head of the party looked to the old man for explanation. He whispered, as the dolls' dressmaker bent over the exhausted form and vainly tried to extract some sign of recognition from it: "It's her drunken father."

As the load was put down in the street, Riah drew the head of the party aside, and whispered that he thought the man was dying. "No, surely not?" returned the other. But he became less confident, on looking, and directed the bearers to "bring him to the nearest doctor's shop."

Thither he was brought; and medical testimony was more precise and more to the purpose than it sometimes is in a Court of Justice. "You had better send for something to cover it. All's over."

Therefore, the police sent for something to cover it, and it was covered and borne through the streets, the people falling away. After it, went the dolls' dressmaker, hiding her face in the Jewish skirts, and clinging to them with one hand, while with the other she plied her stick. It was carried home, and, by reason that the staircase was very narrow, it was put down in the parlor—the little working-bench being set aside to make room for it—and there, in the midst of the dolls with no speculation in their eyes, lay Mr. Dolls with no speculation in his.

The simple arrangements were of Miss Jenny's own making, and were stated to Riah thus :

"I mean to go alone, godmother, in my usual carriage, and you'll be so kind as to keep house while I am gone. It's not far off. And when I return, we'll have a cup of tea, and a chat over future arrangements."

After that previous carrying of him in the streets, the wretched old fellow seemed to be twice buried. He was taken on the shoulders of half a dozen blossom-faced men, who shuffled with him to the church-yard, yet the spectacle of only one little mourner hobbling after, caused many people to turn their heads with a look of interest.

"I must have a very short cry, godmother, before I cheer up for good," said the little creature, coming in. "Because after all a child is a child, you know."

It was a longer cry than might have been expected. Howbeit, it wore itself out in a shadowy corner, and then the dressmaker came forth, washed her face, and made the tea.

A knock was heard at the street door. Riah went to open it, and presently came back, ushering in, with the grave and courteous air that sat so well upon him, a gentleman.

The gentleman was a stranger to the dressmaker; but even in the moment of his casting his eyes upon her, there was something in his manner which brought to her remembrance Mr. Eugene Wrayburn.

"Pardon me," said the gentleman. "You are the dolls' dressmaker?"

"I am the dolls' dressmaker, sir."

"Lizzie Hexam's friend?"

"Yes, sir," replied Miss Jenny, instantly on the defensive, "and Lizzie Hexam's friend."

"Here is a note from her, entreating you to accede to the request of Mr. Mortimer Lightwood, the bearer."

"It's very short," said Jenny, with a look of wonder, when she had read it.

"There was no time to make it longer. Time was so very precious. My dear friend Mr. Eugene Wrayburn is dying."

The dressmaker clasped her hands, and uttered a little piteous cry.

"Is dying," repeated Lightwood, with emotion, "at some

distance from here. He is almost always insensible. In a short restless interval of sensibility, or partial sensibility, I made out that he asked for you to be brought to sit by him. Hardly relying on my own interpretation of the indistinct sounds he made, I caused Lizzie to hear them. We were both sure that he asked for you."

The dressmaker, with her hands still clasped, looked afrightedly from the one to the other of her two companions.

"If you delay, he may die with his request ungratified, with his last wish—intrusted to me—we have long been much more than brothers—unfulfilled."

In a few moments the black bonnet and the crutch-stick were on duty, the good Jew was left in possession of the house, and the dolls' dressmaker, side by side in a chaise with Mortimer Lightwood, was posting out of town.

CHAPTER LII.

A DARKENED and hushed room; the river outside the windows flowing on to the vast ocean; a figure on the bed, swathed and bandaged and bound, lying helpless on its back, with its two useless arms in splints at its sides. Only two days of usage so familiarized the little dressmaker with this scene, that it held the place occupied two days ago by the recollections of years.

He had scarcely moved since her arrival. Sometimes his eyes were open, sometimes closed. When they were open, there was no meaning in their unwinking stare at one spot straight before them, unless for a moment the brow knitted into a faint expression of anger or surprise. Then Mortimer Lightwood would speak to him, and on occasions he would be so far roused as to make an attempt to pronounce his friend's name. But in an instant consciousness was gone again, and no spirit of Eugene was in Eugene's crushed outer form.

They provided Jenny with materials for plying her work, and she had a little table placed at the foot of his bed. Sitting there, with her rich shower of hair falling over the chair-back, they hoped she might attract his notice. With the same object, she would sing, just above her breath, when

he opened his eyes, or she saw his brow knit into that faint expression, so evanescent that it was like a shape made in water. But as yet he had not heeded. The "they" here mentioned, were the medical attendant; Lizzie, who was there in all her intervals of rest; and Lightwood, who never left him.

The two days became three, and the three days became four. At length, quite unexpectedly, he said something in a whisper.

"What was it, my dear Eugene?"

"Will you, Mortimer—"

"Will I—?"

—"Send for her?"

"My dear fellow, she is here."

Quite unconscious of the long blank, he supposed that they were still speaking together.

The little dressmaker stood up at the foot of the bed, humming her song, and nodded to him brightly. "I can't shake hands, Jenny," said Eugene, with something of his old look; "but I am very glad to see you."

Mortimer repeated this to her, for it could only be made out by bending over him and closely watching his attempts to say it. In a little while, he added:

"Ask her if she has seen the children."

Mortimer could not understand this, neither could Jenny herself, until he added:

"Ask her if she has smelled the flowers?"

"Oh! I know!" cried Jenny. "I understand him now!" Then Lightwood yielded his place to her quick approach, and she said, bending over the bed, with that better look: "You mean my long bright slanting rows of children, who used to bring me ease and rest? You mean the children who used to take me up, and make me light?"

Eugene smiled, "Yes."

"I have not seen them since I saw you. I never see them now, but I am hardly ever in pain now."

"It was a pretty fancy," said Eugene.

"But I have heard my birds sing," cried the little creature, "and I have smelled my flowers. Yes, indeed I have! And both were most beautiful and most Divine!"

"Stay and help to nurse me," said Eugene, quietly. "I should like you to have the fancy here, before I die."

She touched his lips with her hand, and shaded her eyes with that same hand as she went back to her work and her little low song. He heard the song with evident pleasure, until she allowed it gradually to sink away into silence.

"Mortimer."

"My dear Eugene."

"If you can give me anything to keep me here for only a few minutes—"

"To keep you here, Eugene."

"To prevent my wandering away I don't know where—for I begin to be sensible that I have just come back, and that I shall lose myself again—do so, dear boy!"

Mortimer gave him such stimulants as could be given him with safety, and bending over him once more, was about to caution him, when he said:

"Don't tell me not to speak, for I must speak. If you knew the harassing anxiety that gnaws and wears me when I am wandering in those places—where are those endless places? They must be at an immense distance!"

He saw in his friend's face that he was losing himself; for he added after a moment: "Don't be afraid—I am not gone yet. What was it?"

"You wanted to tell me something, Eugene."

"This attack, my dear Mortimer; this murder—"

His friend leaned over him with renewed attention, saying: "You and I suspect some one."

"More than suspect. But Mortimer, while I lie here, and when I lie here no longer, I trust to you that the perpetrator is never brought to justice."

"Eugene?"

"Her innocent reputation would be ruined, my friend. She would be punished, not he. I have wronged her enough in fact; I have wronged her still more in intention. You recollect what pavement is said to be made of good intentions. It is made of bad intentions too. Mortimer, I am lying on it, and I know!"

"Be comforted, my dear Eugene."

"I will, when you have promised me. Listen to what I

say to you. It was not the schoolmaster, Bradley Headstone. Do you hear me? Twice; it was not the schoolmaster, Bradley Headstone. Do you hear me? Three times; it was not the schoolmaster, Bradley Headstone."

He stopped, exhausted. His speech had been whispered, broken, and indistinct; but by a great effort he had made it plain enough to be unmistakable.

"Dear fellow. I am wandering away. Stay me for another moment, if you can."

Lightwood lifted his head at the neck, and put a wine-glass to his lips. He rallied.

"I don't know how long ago it was done, whether weeks, days, or hours. No matter. There is inquiry on foot, and pursuit. Say! Is there not?"

"Yes."

"Check it; divert it! Don't let her be brought in question. Shield her. The guilty man, brought to justice, would poison her name. Let the guilty man go unpunished. Lizzie and my reparation before all! Promise me!"

"Eugene, I do. I promise you!"

In the act of turning his eyes gratefully towards his friend, he wandered away.

The dolls' dressmaker, all softened compassion now, watched him with an earnestness that never relaxed. And through this close watching (if through no secret sympathy or power) the little creature attained an understanding of him that Lightwood did not possess. Mortimer would often turn to her, as if she were an interpreter between this sentient world and the insensible man; and she would change the dressing of a wound, or ease a ligature, or turn his face, or alter the pressure of the bedclothes on him, with an absolute certainty of doing right. The natural lightness and delicacy of touch which had become very refined by practice in her miniature work, no doubt was involved in this; but her perception was at least as fine.

One afternoon when he had been lying still, and Lizzie, unrecognized, had just stolen out of the room to pursue her occupation, he uttered Lightwood's name.

"My dear Eugene, I am here."

"How long is this to last, Mortimer?"

Lightwood shook his head. "Still, Eugene, you are no worse than you were."

"But I know there's no hope. Yet I pray it may last long enough for you to do me one last service, and for me to do one last action. Keep me here a few moments, Mortimer."

His friend gave him what aid he could, and encouraged him to believe he was more composed, though even then his eyes were losing the expression they so rarely recovered.

"Hold me here, dear fellow, if you can. Stop my wandering away. I am going!"

"Not yet, not yet. Tell me, dear Eugene, what is it I shall do?"

"Keep me here for only a single minute. I am going away again. Don't let me go. Hear me speak first. Stop me—stop me!"

"My poor Eugene, try to be calm."

"I do try. I try so hard. If you only knew how hard! Don't let me wander till I have spoken. Give me a little more wine."

Lightwood complied. Eugene, with a most pathetic struggle against the unconsciousness that was coming over him, and with a look of appeal that affected his friend profoundly, said:

"You can leave me with Jenny, while you speak to her and tell her what I beseech of her. You can leave me with Jenny, while you are gone. There's not much for you to do. You won't be long away."

"No, no, no. But tell me what it is I shall do, Eugene!"

"I am going! You can't hold me."

"Tell me in a word, Eugene!"

His eyes were fixed again, and the only word that came from his lips was the word millions of times repeated. Lizzie, Lizzie, Lizzie.

But the watchful little dressmaker had been vigilant as ever in her watch, and she now came up and touched Lightwood's arm as he looked down at his friend, despairingly.

"Hush!" she said, with her finger on her lips. "His eyes are closing. He'll be conscious when he next opens them."

She whispered in his ear one short word of a single syllable. Lightwood started, and looked at her.

"Try it," said the little creature, with an excited and exultant face. She then bent over the unconscious man, and, for the first time, kissed him on the cheek, and kissed the poor maimed hand that was nearest to her. Then she withdrew to the foot of the bed.

Some two hours afterwards, Mortimer Lightwood saw his consciousness come back, and instantly, but very tranquilly, bent over him.

"Don't speak, Eugene. Do no more than look at me, and listen to me. You follow what I say."

He moved his head in assent.

"I am going on from the point where we broke off. Is the word we should soon have come to—is it—Wife?"

"O God bless you, Mortimer!"

"Hush! Don't be agitated. Don't speak. Hear me, dear Eugene. Your mind will be more at peace, lying here, if you make Lizzie your wife. You wish me to speak to her, and tell her so, and entreat her to be your wife. You ask her to kneel at this bedside and be married to you, that your reparation may be complete. Is that so?"

"Yes. God bless you! Yes."

"It shall be done, Eugene. Trust it to me. I shall have to go away for some few hours, to give effect to your wishes. You see this is unavoidable?"

"Touch my face with yours, in case I should not hold out till you come back. I love you, Mortimer. Don't be uneasy for me while you are gone. If my dear brave girl will take me, I feel persuaded that I shall live long enough to be married, dear fellow."

Mortimer Lightwood was soon gone. As the evening light lengthened the heavy reflections of the trees in the river, another figure came with a soft step into the sick-room.

"Is he conscious?" asked the little dressmaker, as the figure took its station by the pillow. For Jenny had given place to it immediately, and could not see the sufferer's face.

"He is conscious, Jenny," murmured Eugene for himself. "He knows his wife."

CHAPTER LIII.

MRS. JOHN ROKESMITH sat at needlework in her neat little room, beside a basket of neat little articles of clothing, which presented so much of the appearance of being in the dolls' dressmaker's way of business, that one might have supposed she was going to set up in opposition to Miss Wren.

It was near John's time for coming home, but as Mrs. John was desirous to finish a special triumph of her skill before dinner, she did not go out to meet him.

A knock at the door, and a ring at the bell. Not John; or Bella would have flown out to meet him. Then who, if not John? Bella was asking herself the question, when that fluttering little fool of a servant fluttered in, saying, "Mr. Lightwood!"

Bella had but time to throw a handkerchief over the basket, when Mr. Lightwood made his bow. There was something amiss with Mr. Lightwood, for he was strangely grave and looked ill.

With a brief reference to the happy time when it had been his privilege to know Mrs. Rokesmith as Miss Wilfer, Mr. Lightwood explained what was amiss with him and why he came. He came bearing Lizzie Hexam's earnest hope that Mrs. John Rokesmith would see her married.

Bella was so fluttered by the request, and by the short narrative he had feelingly given her, that there never was a more timely smelling-bottle than John's knock. "My husband," said Bella; "I'll bring him in."

But that turned out to be more easily said than done: for, the instant she mentioned Mr. Lightwood's name, John stopped, with his hand upon the lock of the room door.

"Come up-stairs, my darling."

Bella was amazed by the flush in his face, and by his sudden turning away. "What can it mean?" she thought, as she accompanied him up-stairs.

"You will come to this marriage with me, John dear?"

"N—no, my love; I can't do that."

"You can't do that, John?"

"No, my dear, it's quite out of the question. Not to be thought of."

"Am I to go alone, John?"

"No, my dear, you will go with Mr. Lightwood."

"Don't you think it's time we went down to Mr. Lightwood, John dear?" Bella insinuated.

"My darling, it's almost time you went, but I must ask you to excuse me to him altogether."

"You never mean, John dear, that you are not going to see him? He knows you have come home. I told him so."

"That's a little unfortunate, but it can't be helped. Unfortunate or fortunate, I positively cannot see him, my love. Look at me. I want to speak to you. Don't you remember that you asked me not to declare what I thought of your higher qualities until you had been tried?"

"Yes, John dear. And I fully meant it, and mean it."

"The time will come, my darling—I am no prophet, but I say so,—when you *will* be tried. The time will come, I think, when you will undergo a trial through which you will never pass quite triumphantly for me, unless you can put perfect faith in me."

"Then you may be sure of me, John dear, for I can put perfect faith in you, and I do, and I always, always will. So now, I'll go down to, and go away with Mr. Lightwood."

"Mr. Rokesmith goes with us?" he said, hesitating, with a look towards the door.

"Oh, I forgot!" replied Bella. "His best compliments. His face is swollen to the size of two faces, and he is to go to bed directly, poor fellow, to wait for the doctor, who is coming to lance him."

"It is curious," observed Lightwood, "that I have never yet seen Mr. Rokesmith, though we have been engaged in the same affairs."

"Really!" said the unblushing Bella.

"I begin to think," observed Lightwood, "that I never shall see him."

"These things happen so oddly sometimes," said Bella, with a steady countenance, "that there seems a kind of fatality in them. But I am quite ready, Mr. Lightwood."

They started directly, in a little carriage that Lightwood had brought with him from never-to-be-forgotten Greenwich; and from Greenwich they started directly for Lon-

don; and in London they waited at a railway station until such time as the Reverend Frank Milvey, and Margaretta his wife, with whom Mortimer Lightwood had been already in conference, should come and join them.

A young man of reserved appearance, in a coat and waistcoat of black, and pantaloons of pepper and salt, came into the office of the station, from its interior, in an unsettled way, immediately after Lightwood had gone out to the train; and he had been hurriedly reading the printed bills and notices on the wall. He had had a wandering interest in what was said among the people waiting there and passing to and fro. Mr. Milvey spoke to him.

"I cannot recall your name," he said, "but I remember to have seen you in your school."

"My name is Bradley Headstone, sir," he replied, backing into a more retired place.

"I ought to have remembered it," said Mr. Milvey, giving him his hand. "I hope you are well? A little overworked, I am afraid?"

"Yes, I am overworked just at present, sir. Might I beg leave to speak to you, outside, a moment?"

"By all means."

"One of your ladies, sir, mentioned within my hearing a name that I am acquainted with. The name of the sister of an old pupil of mine. The name of Hexam. The name of Lizzie Hexam." The break he set between his two last sentences was quite embarrassing to his hearer.

"Yes," replied Mr. Milvey. "We are going down to see her."

"I gathered as much, sir. I hope there is nothing amiss with the sister of my old pupil? I hope no bereavement has befallen her. I hope she is in no affliction? Has lost no—relation?"

"I am glad to tell you, Mr. Headstone, that the sister of your old pupil has not sustained any such loss. You thought I might be going down to bury some one?"

"That may have been the connection of ideas, sir, with your clerical character, but I was not conscious of it.—Then you are not, sir?"

"No. In fact," said Mr. Milvey, "since you are so inter-

ested in the sister of your old pupil, I may as well tell you that I am going down to marry her."

The schoolmaster started back.

"Not to marry her, myself," said Mr. Milvey, with a smile, "because I have a wife already. To perform the marriage service at her wedding."

Bradley Headstone caught hold of a pillar. If Mr. Milvey knew an ashy face when he saw it, he saw it then.

"You are quite ill, Mr. Headstone!"

"It is not much, sir. It will pass over very soon. I am accustomed to be seized with giddiness. Don't let me detain you, sir; I stand in need of no assistance, I thank you. Much obliged by your sparing me these minutes of your time."

As Mr. Milvey, who had no more minutes to spare, made a suitable reply and turned back into the office, he observed the schoolmaster to lean against the pillar with his hat in his hand, and to pull at his neckcloth as if he were trying to tear it off. The Reverend Frank accordingly directed the notice of one of the attendants to him, by saying: "There is a person outside who seems to be really ill, and to require some help, though he says he does not."

Far on in the night, Eugene opened his eyes. "How does the time go? Has our Mortimer come back?"

Lightwood was there. "Yes, Eugene, and all is ready."

"Dear boy! we both thank you heartily. Lizzie, tell them how welcome they are, and that I would be eloquent if I could."

"There is no need," said Mr. Milvey. "We know it. Are you better, Mr. Wrayburn?"

"I am much happier," said Eugene.

Then they all stood around the bed, and Mr. Milvey, opening his book, began the service, and did his office with suitable simplicity. As the bridegroom could not move his hand, they touched his fingers with the ring, and so put it on the bride. When the two plighted their troth, she laid her hand on his, and kept it there. When the ceremony was done, and all the rest departed from the room, she drew her arm under his head, and laid her own head upon the pillow by his side.

"Undraw the curtains, my dear girl," said Eugene, after a while, "and let us see our wedding-day."

The sun was rising, and his first rays struck into the room, as she came back, and put her lips to his. "I bless the day!" said Eugene. "I bless the day!" said Lizzie.

"You have made a poor marriage of it, my sweet wife," said Eugene. "A shattered graceless fellow, stretched at his length here, and next to nothing for you when you are a young widow."

"I have made the marriage that I would have given all the world to dare to hope for," she replied.

"Lizzie," said Eugene, after a silence; "when you see me wandering away from this refuge that I have so ill deserved, speak to me by my name, and I think I shall come back."

"Yes, dear Eugene."

"There!" he exclaimed, smiling. "I should have gone then, but for that!"

A little while afterwards, when he appeared to be sinking into insensibility, she said, in a calm loving voice: "Eugene, my dear husband!" He immediately answered: "There again! You see how you can recall me!" And afterwards, when he could not speak, he still answered by a slight movement of his head upon her bosom.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE winds and tides rose and fell a certain number of times, the earth moved round the sun a certain number of times, the ship upon the ocean made her voyage safely, and brought a baby Bella home. Then who so blest and happy as Mrs. John Rokesmith, saving and excepting Mr. John Rokesmith!

She went up to London one day, to meet him, in order that they might make some purchases. She found him waiting for her at their journey's end, and they walked away together through the streets. He was in gay spirits, and they were chatting on the way, when they turned a corner, and met Mr. Lightwood.

He stopped as if he were petrified by the sight of Bella's husband, who in the same moment had changed color.

"Mr. Lightwood and I have met before."

"Met before, John?" Bella repeated in a tone of wonder.

"Mr. Lightwood told me he had never seen you."

"I did not then know that I had," said Lightwood, discomposed on her account. "I believed that I had only heard of—Mr. Rokesmith." With an emphasis on the name.

"When Mr. Lightwood saw me, my love," observed her husband, looking at him, "my name was Julius Handford."

Julius Handford! The name that Bella had so often seen in old newspapers, when she was an inmate of Mrs. Boffin's house! Julius Handford, who had been publicly entreated to appear, and for intelligence of whom a reward had been publicly offered!

"I would have avoided mentioning it in your presence," said Lightwood to Bella, delicately; "but since your husband mentions it himself, I must confirm his strange admission. I saw him as Mr. Julius Handford, and I afterwards (unquestionably to his knowledge) took great pains to trace him out."

"Quite true. But it was not my object or my interest," said Rokesmith, quietly, "to be traced out."

"Sir," returned Lightwood, with a meaning glance towards Bella, "my position is a truly painful one. I hope that no complicity in a very dark transaction may attach to you, but you cannot fail to know that your own extraordinary conduct has laid you under suspicion."

"Mr. Lightwood, I assure you I have no disposition to deny it, or intention to deny it. I am going straight home, and shall remain at home to-morrow until noon. Hereafter, I hope we may be better acquainted. Good-day."

Lightwood stood irresolute, but Bella's husband passed him in the steadiest manner, with Bella on his arm.

When they had dined and were alone, John Rokesmith said to his wife, who had preserved her cheerfulness: "And you don't ask me, my dear, why I bore that name?"

"No, John love. I should dearly like to know, of course;" (which her anxious face confirmed;) "but I wait until you can tell me of your own free will. You asked me if I could have perfect faith in you, and I said yes, and I meant it."

It did not escape Bella's notice that he began to look triumphant. "You heard Mr. Lightwood speak of a dark transaction?"

"Yes, John."

"You are prepared to hear explicitly what he meant?"

"Yes, John."

"My life, he meant the murder of John Harmon, your allotted husband."

With a fast palpitating heart, Bella grasped him by the arm. "You cannot be suspected, John?"

"Dear love, I can be—for I am!"

There was a silence between them, as she sat looking in his face, with the color quite gone from her own face and lips. "How dare they!" she cried at length. "My beloved husband, how dare they!"

He caught her in his arms as she opened hers, and held her to his heart. "Even knowing this, you can trust me, Bella?"

"I can trust you, John dear, with all my soul. If I could not trust you, I should fall dead at your feet."

A twilight calm of happiness then succeeding to their radiant noon, they remained at peace, until a strange voice in the room startled them both. The room being by that time dark, the voice said, "Don't let the lady be alarmed by my striking a light," and immediately a match rattled, and glimmered in a hand. The hand and the match and the voice were then seen by John Rokesmith to belong to Mr. Inspector, once meditatively active in this chronicle.

"I take the liberty," said Mr. Inspector, in a business-like manner, "to bring myself to the recollection of Mr. Julius Handford, who gave me his name and address down at our place a considerable time ago. Would the lady object to my lighting the pair of candles on the chimney-piece, to throw a further light upon the subject? No? Thank you, ma'am. Now we look cheerful. You favored me, Mr. Handford, by writing down your name and address, and I produce the piece of paper on which you wrote it. Comparing the same with the writing on the fly-leaf of this book on the table—and a sweet pretty volume it is—I find the writing of the entry, 'Mrs. John Rokesmith. From her husband on her birthday'—and very gratifying to the feelings such memori-

als are—to correspond exactly. Can I have a word with you?"

"Certainly. Here, if you please," was the reply.

"Why," retorted Mr. Inspector, "though there's nothing for the lady to be at all alarmed at, still, ladies are apt to take alarm at matters of business; if the lady was to step upstairs, and take a look at baby now!"

"Mrs. Rokesmith," said her husband, "is satisfied that she can have no reason for being alarmed, whatever the business is. Do you propose to take me into custody?"

"I propose that you shall come along with me."

"For what reason?"

"Lord bless my soul and body!" returned Mr. Inspector, "I wonder at it in a man of your education. Why argue?"

"What do you charge against me?"

"I wonder at you before a lady," said Mr. Inspector, shaking his head reproachfully: "I wonder, brought up as you have been, you haven't a more delicate mind? I charge you, then, with being some way concerned in the Harmon Murder."

"You don't surprise me. I foresaw your visit this afternoon."

"Don't?" said Mr. Inspector. "Why, why argue? It's my duty to inform you that whatever you say, will be used against you."

"I don't think it will."

"But I tell you it will," said Mr. Inspector. "Now, having received the caution, do you still say that you foresaw my visit this afternoon?"

"Yes. And I will say something more, if you will step with me into the next room."

With a reassuring kiss on the lips of the frightened Bella, her husband (to whom Mr. Inspector obligingly offered his arm), took up a candle, and withdrew with that gentleman. They were a full half-hour in conference. When they returned, Mr. Inspector looked considerably astonished; but John was triumphant; that much was made apparent; and she could wait for the rest.

When John came home to dinner next day, he said, sit-

ting down on the sofa by Bella and baby-Bella: "My dear, I have a piece of news to tell you. I have left the China House. I am in another way of business. And I am rather better off."

The inexhaustible baby was instantly made to congratulate him, and to say, with appropriate action on the part of a very limp arm and a speckled fist, "Three cheers, ladies and gemple-morums. Hoo—ray!"

"I am afraid, my life," said John, "that you have become very much attached to this cottage?"

"Afraid I have, John? Of course I have."

"The reason why I said afraid," returned John, "is, because we must move."

"O John!"

"Yes, my dear, we must move. We must have our headquarters in London now. In short, there's a dwelling rent-free, attached to my new position, and we must occupy it."

"That's a gain, John."

"Yes, my dear, it is undoubtedly a gain."

He gave her a very blithe look, and a very sly look. Which occasioned the inexhaustible baby to square at him with the speckled fists, and demand in a threatening manner what he meant?

"But really, John dear," said Bella, flushed in quite a lovely manner, "will the new house, just as it stands, do for baby? That's the question."

"I felt that to be the question," he returned, "and therefore I arranged that you should come with me and look at it, to-morrow morning." Appointment made, accordingly, for Bella to go up with him to-morrow morning; John kissed; and Bella delighted.

When they reached London in pursuance of their little plan, they took coach and drove westward. Not only drove westward, but drove into that particular westward division which Bella had seen last when she turned her face from Mr. Boffin's door. Not only drove into that particular division, but drove at last into that very street. Not only drove into that very street, but stopped at last at that very house.

"John dear!" cried Bella, looking out of window in a flutter. "Do you see where we are?"

"Yes, my love. The coachman's quite right."

The house-door was opened without any knocking or ringing, and John promptly helped her out. The servant who stood holding the door, asked no question of John, neither did he go before them or follow them as they went straight up-stairs. It was only her husband's encircling arm, urging her on, that prevented Bella from stopping at the foot of the staircase. As they ascended, it was seen to be tastefully ornamented with most beautiful flowers.

"O John!" said Bella, faintly. "What does this mean?"

"Nothing, my darling, nothing. Let us go on."

Going on a little higher, they came to a charming aviary, in which tropical birds, more gorgeous in color than the flowers, were flying about; and among those birds were gold and silver fish, and mosses, and water-lilies, and a fountain, and all manner of wonders.

"O my dear John!" said Bella. "What does this mean?"

"Nothing, my darling, nothing. Let us go on."

They went on, until they came to a door. As John put out his hand to open it, Bella caught his hand.

"I don't know what it means, but it's too much for me. Hold me, John, love."

John caught her up in his arms, and lightly dashed into the room with her.

Behold Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, beaming! Behold Mrs. Boffin clapping her hands in an ecstasy, running to Bella with tears of joy pouring down her comely face, and folding her to her breast, with the words: "My deary, deary, deary girl, that Noddy and me saw married and couldn't wish joy to, or so much as speak to! My deary, deary, deary, wife of John and mother of his little child! My loving loving, bright bright, Pretty Pretty! Welcome to your house and home, my deary!"

CHAPTER LV.

IN all the first bewilderment of her wonder, the most bewilderingly wonderful thing to Bella was the shining countenance of Mr. Boffin. But, that he, with a perfectly

beneficent air and a plump rosy face, should be standing there, looking at her and John, like some jovial good spirit, was marvelous.

Mrs. Boffin seated Bella on the large ottoman, and seated herself beside her, and John her husband seated himself on the other side of her, and Mr. Boffin stood beaming at every one and every thing he could see, with surpassing jollity and enjoyment.

"Old lady, old lady," said Mr. Boffin, "if you don't begin somebody else must."

"I'm a-going to begin, Noddy, my dear," returned Mrs. Boffin. "Only it isn't easy for a person to know where to begin, when a person is in this state of delight and happiness. Bella, my dear. Tell me, who's this?"

"Who is this?" repeated Bella. "My husband."

"Ah! But tell me his name, deary!" cried Mrs. Boffin.

"Rokesmith."

"No, it ain't!" cried Mrs. Boffin, clapping her hands and shaking her head. "Not a bit of it!"

"Handford, then," suggested Bella.

"No, it ain't!" cried Mrs. Boffin, again clapping her hands, and shaking her head. "Not a bit of it."

"At least his name is John, I suppose?" said Bella.

"Ah! I should think so, deary!" cried Mrs. Boffin. "I should hope so! Many and many is the time I have called him by his name of John. But what's his other name, his true other name? Give a guess, my pretty!"

"I can't guess," said Bella, turning her pale face from one to another.

"I could," cried Mrs. Boffin, "and what's more, I did! I found him out, all in a flash as I may say, one night. Didn't I Noddy?"

"Ay! That the old lady did!" said Mr. Boffin.

"Harkee to me, deary," pursued Mrs. Boffin, taking Bella's hands between her own, and gently beating on them from time to time. "It was after a particular night when John had been disappointed—as he thought—in his affections. It was after a night when John had made an offer to a certain young lady, and the certain young lady had refused it. It was after a particular night, when he felt himself cast-

away-like, and had made up his mind to go seek his fortune. It was the very next night. My Noddy wanted a paper out of his Secretary's room, and I says to Noddy, 'I am going by the door, and I'll ask him for it.' I tapped at his door, and he didn't hear me. I looked in, and saw him a-sitting lonely by his fire, brooding over it. He chanced to look up with a pleased kind of smile in my company when he saw me, and then in a single moment every grain of the gunpowder that had been lying sprinkled thick about him ever since I first set eyes upon him as a man at the Bower, took fire! Too many a time had I seen him sitting lonely, when he was a poor child, to be pitied, heart and hand! Too many a time had I seen him in need of being brightened up with a comforting word! Too many and too many a time to be mistaken, when that glimpse of him come at last! No, no! I just makes out to cry, 'I know you now! You're John!' And he catches me as I drops.—So what," said Mrs. Boffin, breaking off in the rush of her speech to smile most radiantly, "might you think by this time that your husband's name was, dear?"

"Not," returned Bella, with quivering lips: "not Harmon? That's not possible?"

"Don't tremble. Why not possible, deary, when so many things are possible?" demanded Mrs. Boffin, in a soothing tone.

"He was killed," gasped Bella.

"Thought to be," said Mrs. Boffin. "But if ever John Harmon drew the breath of life on earth, that is certainly John Harmon's arm round your waist now, my pretty. If ever John Harmon had a wife on earth, that wife is certainly you. If ever John Harmon and his wife had a child on earth, that child is certainly this."

By a master-stroke of secret arrangement, the inexhaustible baby here appeared at the door, suspended in mid-air by invisible agency. Mrs. Boffin, plunging at it, brought it to Bella's lap, where both Mrs. and Mr. Boffin (as the saying is) "took it out of" the Inexhaustible in a shower of caresses. It was only this timely appearance that kept Bella from swooning.

"But bless ye, my beauty!" cried Mrs. Boffin, with

another hearty clap of her hands. "It wasn't John only that was in it. We was all on us in it."

"I don't," said Bella, looking vacantly from one to another, "yet understand—"

"Of course you don't, my deary," exclaimed Mrs. Boffin. "How can you till you're told? When I cries out that night, 'I know you now! you're John!' John catches me, it is true; but I ain't a light weight, bless ye, and he's forced to let me down. Noddy, he hears a noise, and in he trots, and as soon as I anyways comes to myself I calls to him, 'Noddy, well I might say as I did say, that night at the Bower, for the Lord be thankful this is John!' On which he gives a heave, and down he goes likewise, with his head under the writing-table. This brings me round comfortable, and that brings him round comfortable, and then John and him and me we all fall a-crying for joy. John, he tells us how he is despairing in his mind on accounts of a certain fair young person, and how, if I hadn't found him out, he was going away to seek his fortune far and wide, and had fully meant never to come to life, but to leave the property as our wrongful inheritance for ever and a day. At which you never see a man so frightened as my Noddy was. For to think that he should have come into the property wrongful, however innocent, and—more than that—might have gone on keeping it to his dying day, turned him whiter than chalk. Noddy gives it as his opinion that the certain fair young person is a deary creetur. 'She may be a little spoilt, and nat'rally spoilt,' he says, 'by circumstances, but that's only on the surface, and I lay my life,' he says, 'that she's the true golden gold at heart.' Then says John, O, if he could but prove so! Then we both of us ups and says, that minute, 'Prove so!' Then we says, 'What will content you? If she was to stand up for you when you was slighted, if she was to show herself of a generous mind when you was oppressed, if she was to be truest to you when you was poorest and friendlessest, and all this against her own seeming interest, how would that do?' 'Do?' says John, 'it would raise me to the skies.' 'Then,' says my Noddy, 'make your preparations for the ascent, John, it being my firm belief that up you go!'

"Well! Then says my Noddy, shaking his sides till he was fit to make 'em ache again: 'Look out for being slighted and oppressed, John, for if ever a man had a hard master, you shall find me from this present time to be such to you.' And then he began!" cried Mrs. Boffin, in an ecstasy of admiration. "Lord bless you, then he began! And how he *did* begin; didn't he! But, bless you, if you could have seen him of a night, at that time of it! The way he'd sit and chuckle over himself! The way he'd say, 'I've been a regular brown bear to-day,' and take himself in his arms and hug himself at the thoughts of the brute he had pretended. But every night he says to me: 'Better and better, old lady. What did we say of her? She'll come through it, the true golden gold. This'll be the happiest piece of work we ever done.' And then he'd say, 'I'll be a grislier old growler to-morrow!' and laugh, he would, till John and me was often forced to slap his back, and bring it out of his windpipes with a little water.

"And so my good and pretty," pursued Mrs. Boffin, "you was married, and there was we hid up in the church-organ by this husband of yours; for he wouldn't let us out with it then, as was first meant. 'No,' he says, 'she's so unselfish and contented, that I can't afford to be rich yet. I must wait a little longer.' Then, when baby was expected, he says, 'She is such a cheerful, glorious housewife that I can't afford to be rich yet. I must wait a little longer.' Then when baby was born, he says, 'She is so much better than she ever was, that I can't afford to be rich yet. I must wait a little longer.' And so he goes on and on, till I says outright, 'Now, John, if you don't fix a time for setting her up in her own house and home, and letting us walk out of it, I'll turn Informer. Then he says he'll only wait to triumph beyond what we ever thought possible, and to show her to us better than even we ever supposed; and he says, 'She shall see me under suspicion of having murdered myself, and *you* shall see how trusting and how true she'll be.' Well! Noddy and me agreed to that, and he was right, and here you are, and the horses is in, and the story is done, and God bless you my Beauty, and God bless us all!"

Bella and Mrs. Boffin took a good long hug of one another.

er, to the apparent peril of the inexhaustible baby, lying staring in Bella's lap.

"But *is* the story done?" said Bella, pondering. "Is there no more of it?"

She looked hard at Mr. Boffin, who had moved to a table where he was leaning his head upon his hand with his face turned away, and, quietly settling herself on her knees at his side, and drawing one arm over his shoulder, said: "Please I beg your pardon, and I made a small mistake of a word when I took leave of you last. Please I think you are better (not worse) than Hopkins, better (not worse) than Dancer, better (not worse) than Blackberry Jones, better (not worse) than any of them! Please something more!" cried Bella, with an exultant ringing laugh as she struggled with him and forced him to turn his delighted face to hers. "Please I have found out something not yet mentioned. Please I don't believe you are a hard-hearted miser at all, and please I don't believe you ever for one single minute were!"

At this, Mrs. Boffin fairly screamed with rapture, and sat beating her feet upon the floor, clapping her hands, and bobbing herself backwards and forwards, like a demented member of some Mandarin's family.

"Still," said Bella, after a meditative pause, "Mrs. Boffin never supposed any part of the change in Mr. Boffin to be real; did she?—You never did; did you?"

"No!" returned Mrs. Boffin.

"And yet you took it very much to heart," said Bella.

"Ecod, you see Mrs. John has a sharp eye, John!" cried Mr. Boffin, shaking his head with an admiring air. "You're right, my dear. The old lady nearly blowed us into shivers and smithers, many times."

"Why?" asked Bella. "How did that happen, when she was in your secret?"

"Why, it was a weakness in the old lady," said Mr. Boffin; "and yet, to tell you the whole truth and nothing but the truth, I'm rather proud of it. My dear, the old lady thinks so high of me that she couldn't abear to see and hear me coming out as a reg'lar brown one. Couldn't abear to make believe as I meant it! I assure you, my dear, that on

the celebrated day when I made what has since been agreed upon to be my grandest demonstration—I allude to Mew says the cat, Quack quack says the duck, and Bow-wow-wow says the dog, them flinty and unbelieving words hit my old lady so hard on my account, that I had to hold her, to prevent her running out after you, and defending me by saying I was playing a part.”

Mrs. Boffin laughed heartily again, and her eyes glistened again, and it then appeared, not only that in that burst of sarcastic eloquence Mr. Boffin was considered by his two fellow-conspirators to have outdone himself, but that in his own opinion it was a remarkable achievement. “Never thought of it afore the moment, my dear!” he observed to Bella. “When John said, if he had been so happy as to win your affections and possess your heart, it come into my head to turn round upon him with ‘Win her affections and possess her heart! Mew says the cat, Quack quack says the duck, and Bow-wow-wow says the dog.’ I couldn’t tell you how it come into my head or where from, but it had so much the sound of a rasper that I own to you it astonished myself. I was awful nigh bursting out a-laughing though, when it made John stare!”

Then Mrs. John Harmon went about to see her house. And a dainty house it was, and a tastefully beautiful; and they went through it in procession; the inexhaustible on Mrs. Boffin’s bosom (still staring) occupying the middle station, and Mr. Boffin bringing up the rear. And on Bella’s exquisite toilet table was an ivory casket, and in the casket were jewels the like of which she had never dreamed of, and aloft on an upper floor was a nursery garnished as with rainbows; “though we were hard put to it,” said John Harmon, “to get it done in so short a time.”

CHAPTER LVI.

MR. AND MRS. JOHN HARMON had so timed their taking possession of their rightful name and their London house, that the event befell on the very day when the last wagon-load of the last Mound was driven out at the gates of Boffin’s Bower. As it jolted away, Mr. Wegg felt

that the last load was correspondingly removed from his mind, and hailed the auspicious season when that black sheep, Boffin, was to be closely sheared.

A foreman-representative of the dust contractors, purchasers of the Mounds, had worn Mr. Wegg down to skin and bone. This supervisor of the proceedings, asserting his employers' rights to cart off by daylight, nightlight, torchlight, when they would, must have been the death of Silas if the work had lasted much longer. Seeming never to need sleep himself, he would reappear, with a tied-up broken head, in fantail hat and velveteen smalls, like an accursed goblin, at the most unholy and untimely hours. Tired out by keeping close ward over a long day's work in fog and rain, Silas would have just crawled to bed and be dozing, when a horrid shake and rumble under his pillow would announce an approaching train of carts, escorted by this Demon of Unrest, to fall to work again. At another time, he would be rumbled up out of his soundest sleep, in the dead of night; at another, would be kept at his post eight-and-forty hours on end.

To Mr. Venus's museum Mr. Wegg repaired when at length the Mounds were down and gone. It being evening, he found that gentleman seated over his fire.

"Why, you smell rather comfortable here!" said Wegg, seeming to take it ill, and stopping and sniffing as he entered.

"I *am* rather comfortable, sir!" said Venus.

"And you've been having your hair cut!" said Wegg, missing the usual dusty shock.

"Yes, Mr. Wegg."

"And I am blessed if you ain't getting fat!" said Wegg, with culminating discontent. "What are you going to do next?"

"Well, Mr. Wegg," said Venus, "I suspect you could hardly guess what I am going to do next."

"I don't want to guess," retorted Wegg. "All I've got to say is, that it's well for you that the diuision of labor has been what it has been. Why, you've been having the place cleaned up!"

"Yes, Mr. Wegg. By the hand of adorable woman."

"Then what you're going to do next, I suppose, is to get married?"

"That's it, sir."

"To the old party?"

"Mr. Wegg! The lady in question is not a old party."

"I meant," explained Wegg, testily, "to the party as formerly objected?"

"Mr. Wegg," said Venus, "in a case of so much delicacy, I must trouble you to say what you mean. There are strings that must not be played upon. No sir! Not sounded, unless in the most respectful and tuneful manner. Of such melodious strings is Miss Pleasant Riderhood formed."

"Then it *is* the lady as formerly objected?" said Wegg.

"Sir," returned Venus with dignity. "I accept the altered phrase. It is the lady as formerly objected."

"However, Mr. Venus," said Wegg, after eyeing him with a touch of distrust, "I wish you joy. One man spends his fortune in one way, and another in another. You are going to try matrimony. I mean to try traveling."

"Indeed, Mr. Wegg?"

"Change of air, sea-scenery, and my natural rest, I hope may bring me round after the persecutions I have undergone from the dustman with his head tied up, which I just now mentioned. The tough job being ended and the Mounds laid low, the hour is come for Boffin to stump up. Would ten to-morrow morning suit you, partner, for finally bringing Boffin's nose to the grindstone?"

Ten to-morrow morning would quite suit Mr. Venus for that excellent purpose.

Venus was punctual, and Wegg undertook to knock at the door, and conduct the conference. Door knocked at. Door opened.

"Boffin at home?"

The servant replied that *Mr.* Boffin was at home.

"He'll do," said Wegg, "though it ain't what I call him."

The servant inquired if they had any appointment.

"Now, I tell you what, young fellow," said Wegg, "I won't have it. This won't do for me. I don't want menials. I want Boffin."

They were shown into a waiting-room, where the all-powerful Wegg wore his hat, and whistled, and with his

forefinger stirred up a clock that stood upon the chimney-piece, until he made it strike. In a few minutes they were shown up-stairs into what used to be Boffin's room; which, besides the door of entrance, had folding-doors in it, to make it one of a suite of rooms when occasion required. Here Boffin was seated at a library-table, and here Mr. Wegg, having imperiously motioned the servant to withdraw, drew up a chair and seated himself, in his hat, close beside him. Mr. Wegg instantly underwent the remarkable experience of having his hat twitched off his head and thrown out of a window, which was opened and shut for the purpose.

"Be careful what insolent liberties you take in that gentleman's presence," said the owner of the hand which had done this, "or I'll throw you after it."

Wegg involuntarily clapped his hand to his bare head, and stared at the Secretary. For it was he who addressed him with a severe countenance, and who had come in quietly by the folding-doors.

"Oh!" said Wegg, as soon as he recovered his suspended power of speech. "Very good! I gave directions for *you* to be dismissed. And you ain't gone, ain't you? Oh! We'll look into this presently. Very good!"

"No, nor *I* ain't gone," said another voice.

Somebody else had come in quietly by the folding-doors. Turning his head, Wegg beheld his persecutor, the ever-wakeful dustman, accoutred with fantail hat and velveteen smalls complete. Who, untying his broken head, revealed a head that was whole, and a face that was Sloppy's.

"Ha, ha, ha, gentlemen!" roared Sloppy in a peal of laughter, and with immeasurable relish. "He never thought as I could sleep standing, and often done it when I turned for Mrs. Higden! He never thought as I used to give Mrs. Higden the Police-news in different voices! But I did lead him a life all through it, gentlemen, I hope I really and truly *DID!*" Here Mr. Sloppy, opening his mouth to a quite alarming extent, and throwing back his head to peal again, revealed incalculable buttons.

"Oh!" said Wegg, slightly discomfited, but not much as yet; "one and one is two not dismissed, is it? Bof—fin! I want the room cleared of these two scum."

"That's not going to be done, Wegg," replied Mr. Boffin.

"Bof—fin! Not going to be done?" repeated Wegg. "Not at your peril?"

"No, Wegg," said Mr. Boffin, shaking his head good-humoredly. "Not at my peril, and not on any other terms."

Wegg reflected a moment, and then said: "Mr. Venus, will you be so good as to hand me over that same dockyment?"

"Certainly, sir," replied Venus, handing it to him with much politeness. "There it is. Having now, sir, parted with it, I wish to make a small observation; Silas Wegg, you precious old rascal, I took the liberty of taking Mr. Boffin into our concern as a sleeping partner, at a very early period of our firm's existence."

"Quite true," added Mr. Boffin; "and I tested Venus by making him a pretended proposal or two; and I found him on the whole a very honest man, Wegg."

"Thank you, sir," said Venus, "I am much obliged to you, sir, for all. For your good opinion now, for your way of receiving and encouraging me when I first put myself in communication with you, and for the influence since so kindly brought to bear upon a certain lady, both by yourself and by Mr. John Harmon."

Wegg followed the name with sharp ears, and the action with sharp eyes, and a certain cringing air was infusing itself into his bullying air, when his attention was reclaimed by Venus.

"Everything else between you and me, Mr. Wegg," said Venus, "now explains itself, and you can now make out, sir, without further words from me."

"You are a fool," said Wegg, with a snap of his fingers, "and I'd have got rid of you before now, if I could have struck out any way of doing it. You may go, and welcome. You leave the more for me. Because, you know," said Wegg, dividing his next observation between Mr. Boffin and Mr. Harmon, "I am worth my price, and I mean to have it. I am here to be bought off, and I have named my figure. Now, buy me, or leave me."

"I'll leave you, Wegg," said Mr. Boffin, laughing, "as far as I am concerned."

"Bof—fin!" replied Wegg, turning upon him with a severe air, "I understand *your* new-born boldness. But Mr. Harmon is in another sitiuation. What Mr. Harmon risks, is quite another pair of shoes. Now, I've heerd something lately about this being Mr. Harmon, and I drop you, Bof—fin, as beneath my notice. I ask Mr. Harmon whether he has any idea of the contents of this present paper?"

"It is a will of my late father's, of more recent date than the will proved by Mr. Boffin (address whom again, as you have addressed him already, and I'll knock you down), leaving the whole of his property to the Crown," said John Harmon, with as much indifference as was compatible with extreme sternness.

"Right you are!" cried Wegg. "Then, I put the question to you, what's this paper worth?"

"Nothing," said John Harmon.

Wegg had repeated the word with a sneer, and was entering on some sarcastic retort, when, to his boundless amazement, he found himself gripped by the cravat; shaken until his teeth chattered; shoved back, staggering, into a corner of the room; and pinned there.

"You scoundrel!" said John Harmon, whose seafaring hold was like that of a vise.

"You're knocking my head against the wall," urged Silas faintly.

"I'd give a thousand pounds for leave to knock your brains out. Listen, you scoundrel, and look at that Dutch bottle."

Sloppy held it up, for his edification.

"That Dutch bottle, scoundrel, contained the latest will of the many wills made by my unhappy self-tormenting father. That will gives everything absolutely to my noble benefactor and yours, Mr. Boffin, excluding and reviling me, and my sister (then already dead of a broken heart), by name. That Dutch bottle was found by my noble benefactor and yours, after he entered on possession of the estate. That Dutch bottle distressed him beyond measure, because, though I and my sister were both no more, it cast a slur upon our memory which he knew we had done nothing in our miserable youth to deserve. That Dutch bottle, therefore, he buried in the

Mound belonging to him, and there it lay while you, you thankless wretch, were prodding and poking—often very near it, I dare say. His intention was, that it should never see the light; but he was afraid to destroy it, lest to destroy such a document, even with his great generous motive, might be an offense at law. After the discovery was made here who I was, Mr. Boffin told me, upon certain conditions impossible for such a hound as you to appreciate, the secret of that Dutch bottle. I urged upon him the necessity of its being dug up, and the paper being legally produced and established. The first thing you saw him do, and the second thing has been done without your knowledge. Consequently, the paper now rattling in your hand as I shake you—and I should like to shake the life out of you—is worth less than the rotten cork of the Dutch bottle, do you understand?"

Judging from the fallen countenance of Silas as his head wagged backwards and forwards in a most uncomfortable manner, he did understand.

Here John Harmon assisted his comprehension with another shake.

"Now, scoundrel," he pursued, "you supposed me, just now, to be the possessor of my father's property.—So I am. But through any act of my father's, or by any right I have? No! Through the munificence of Mr Boffin. The conditions that he made with me, before parting with the secret of the Dutch bottle, were that I should take the fortune, and that he should take his Mound and no more. I owe everything I possess, solely to the disinterestedness, uprightness, tenderness, goodness (there are no words to satisfy me) of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin. And when, knowing what I knew, I saw such a mud-worm as you presume to rise in this house against this noble soul, the wonder is," added John Harmon, through his clenched teeth, and with a very ugly turn indeed on Wegg's cravat, "that I didn't try to twist your head off, and fling *that* out of window! So. Do you understand?"

"I am sorry, Wegg," said Mr. Boffin, in his clemency, "that my old lady and I can't have a better opinion of you than the bad one we are forced to entertain. But I shouldn't like to leave you, after all said and done, worse off

in life than I found you. Therefore say in a word, before we part, what it'll cost to set you up in another stall. Here's a couple of pound."

"In justice to myself, I couldn't take it, sir."

The words were but out of his mouth when John Harmon lifted his finger, and Sloppy, who was now close to Wegg, backed to Wegg's back, stooped, grasped his coat-collar behind with both hands, and deftly swung him up like a sack of flour. Mr. Sloppy's instructions had been to deposit his burden in the road; but a scavenger's cart happening to stand unattended at the corner, with its little ladder planted against the wheel, Mr. S. found it impossible to resist the temptation of shooting Mr. Silas Wegg into the cart's contents—a somewhat difficult feat, achieved with great dexterity, and with a prodigious splash.

CHAPTER LVII.

HOW Bradley Headstone had been racked and riven in his mind since the quiet evening when by the riverside he had risen, as it were, out of the ashes of the barge-man, none but he could have told. Not even he could have told, for such misery can only be felt.

Time went by, and no visible suspicion dogged him; time went by, and in such public accounts of the attack as were renewed at intervals, he began to see Mr. Lightwood (who acted as lawyer for the injured man) straying further from the fact, going wider of the issue, and evidently slackening in his zeal. By degrees, a glimmering of the cause of this began to break on Bradley's sight. Then came the chance encounter with Mr. Milvey at the railway station.

He saw that through his desperate attempt to separate those two for ever, he had been made the means of uniting them. That he had dipped his hands in blood, to mark himself a miserable fool and tool. That Eugene Wrayburn, for his wife's sake, set him aside and left him to crawl along his blasted course.

One winter day when a slight fall of snow was feathering the sills and frames of the schoolroom windows, he stood at his blackboard, crayon in hand, about to commence with

a class; when, reading in the countenances of those boys that there was something wrong, and that they seemed in alarm for him, he turned his eyes to the door towards which they faced. He then saw a slouching man of forbidding appearance standing in the midst of the school, with a bundle under his arm; and saw that it was Riderhood.

He sat down on a stool which one of his boys put for him, and he had a passing knowledge that he was in danger of falling, and that his face was becoming distorted. But the fit went off for that time, and he wiped his mouth, and stood up again.

"Beg your pardon, governor! By your leave!" said Riderhood, knuckling his forehead, with a chuckle and a leer. "What place may this be?"

"This is a school."

"Where young folks learns wot's right?" said Riderhood, gravely nodding. "Beg your pardon! governor! By your leave! But who teaches this school?"

"I do."

"You're the master, are you, learned governor?"

"Yes. I am the master."

"And a lovely thing it must be," said Riderhood, "fur to learn young folks wot's right, and fur to know wot *they* know wot you do it. Beg your pardon, learned governor! By your leave!—That there blackboard; wot's it for?"

"It is for drawing on, or writing on."

"Is it though!" said Riderhood. "Who'd have thought it, from the looks on it! *Would* you be so kind as to write your name upon it, learned governor?"

Bradley hesitated for a moment; but placed his usual signature, enlarged, upon the board.

"I ain't a learned character myself," said Riderhood, surveying the class, "but I do admire learning in others. I should dearly like to hear these here young folks read that there name off, from the writing."

The arms of the class went up. At the miserable master's nod, the shrill chorus arose: "Bradley Headstone!"

"No?" cried Riderhood. "You don't mean it? Headstone! Why, that's in a church-yard. Hooroar for another turn!"

Another tossing of arms, another nod, and another shrill chorus: "Bradley Headstone!"

"I've got it now!" said Riderhood, after attentively listening. "Might you be acquainted, learned governor, with a person of about your own height and breadth, and wot 'ud pull down in a scale about your own weight, answering to a name sounding summat like T'otherest?"

With a desperation in him that made him perfectly quiet, though his jaw was heavily squared; with his eyes upon Riderhood; and with traces of quickened breathing in his nostrils; the schoolmaster replied in a suppressed voice, after a pause: "I think I know the man you mean."

"I thought you knowed the man I mean, learned governor. I want the man."

With a half glance around him at his pupils, Bradley returned: "Do you suppose he is here?"

"Begging your pardon, learned governor, and by your leave," said Riderhood, with a laugh, "how could I suppose he's here, when there's nobody here but you, and me, and these young lambs wot you're a learning on? But he is most excellent company, that man, and I want him to come and see me at my lock, up the river."

"I'll tell him so."

"D'ye think he'll come?" asked Riderhood.

"I am sure he will."

"Having got your word for him," said Riderhood, "I shall count upon him. P'raps you'd so fur obleege me, learned governor, as tell him that if he don't come precious soon, I'll look him up."

"He shall know it."

"Thankee. As I says a while ago," pursued Riderhood, changing his hoarse tone and leering round upon the class again, "though not a learned character my own self, I do admire learning in others, to be sure! Being here and having met with your kind attention, Master, might I, afore I go, ask a question of these here young lambs of yours?"

"If it is in the way of school," said Bradley, always sustaining his dark look at the other, and speaking in his suppressed voice, "you may."

"Oh! It's in the way of school!" cried Riderhood. "I'll

pound it, Master, to be in the way of school. Wot's the divisions of water, my lambs? Wot sorts of water is there on the land?"

Shrill chorus: "Seas, rivers, lakes, and ponds."

"Seas, rivers, lakes, and ponds," said Riderhood. "They've got all the lot, Master! Blowed if I shouldn't have left out lakes, never having clapped eyes upon one, to my knowledge. Seas, rivers, lakes, and ponds. Wot is it, lambs, as they ketches in seas, rivers, lakes, and ponds?"

Shrill chorus (with some contempt for the ease of the question): "Fish!"

"Good agin!" said Riderhood. "But wot else is it, my lambs, as they sometimes ketches in rivers?"

Chorus at a loss. One shrill voice: "Weed!"

"Good agin!" cried Riderhood. "But it ain't weed neither. You'll never guess, my dears. Wot is it, besides fish, as they sometimes ketches in rivers? Well! I'll tell you. It's suits o' clothes."

Bradley's face changed.

"Leastways, lambs," said Riderhood, observing him out of the corners of his eyes, "that's wot I my own self sometimes ketches in rivers. For strike me blind, my lambs, if I didn't ketch in a river the wery bundle under my arm!"

The class looked at the master, as if appealing from the irregular entrapment of this mode of examination. The master looked at the examiner, as if he would have torn him to pieces.

"I ask your pardon, learned governor," said Riderhood, smearing his sleeve across his mouth as he laughed with a relish, "tain't fair to the lambs, I know. It wos a bit of fun of mine. But upon my soul I drawed this here bundle out of a river! It's a bargeman's suit of clothes. You see, it had been sunk there by the man as wore it, and I got it up."

"How do you know it was sunk by the man who wore it?" asked Bradley.

"'Cause I see him do it," said Riderhood.

They looked at each other. Bradley, slowly withdrawing his eyes, turned his face to the blackboard and slowly wiped his name out.

"A heap of thanks, Master," said Riderhood, "for be-

stowing so much of your time, and of the lambses' time, upon a man as hasn't got no other recommendation to you than being a honest man. Wishing to see at my lock up the river, the person as we've spoke of, and as you've answered for, I takes my leave of the lambs and of their learned governor both."

The next day but one was Saturday, and a holiday. Bradley rose early, and set out on foot for Plashwater Weir Mill Lock. He rose so early that it was not yet light when he began his journey. Before extinguishing the candle by which he had dressed himself, he made a little parcel of his decent silver watch and its decent guard, and wrote inside the paper: "Kindly take care of these for me." He then addressed the parcel to Miss Peecher, and left it on the most protected corner of the little seat in her little porch.

It was a cold hard easterly morning when he latched the garden gate and turned away. He took heed of nothing but the ice, the snow, and the distance, until he saw a light, which he knew gleamed from the lock-house window.

The light was the joint product of a fire and a candle. Between the two, with his feet on the iron fender, sat Riderhood, pipe in mouth.

He looked up with a surly nod when his visitor came in. His visitor looked down with a surly nod. His outer clothing removed, the visitor then took a seat on the opposite side of the fire.

Riderhood looked hard at his hands and his pockets, apparently as a precautionary measure lest he should have any weapon about him. But he now leaned forward, turning the collar of his waistcoat with an inquisitive finger, and asked, "Why, where's your watch?"

"I have left it behind."

"I want it; but it can be fetched; I've took a fancy to it." Bradley answered with a contemptuous laugh.

"I want it," repeated Riderhood, "and I mean to have it."

"That is what you want of me, is it?"

"No," said Riderhood, "it's on'y part of what I want of you. I want money of you."

"Anything else?"

"Everything else!" roared Riderhood, in a very loud and

furious way. "Look here, Bradley Headstone, Master. You might have split the T'other governor to chips and wedges, without my caring, except that I might have come upon you for a glass or so now and then. Else why have to do with you at all? But when you copied my clothes, and when you copied my neckhankercher, and when you shook blood upon me after you had done the trick, you did wot I'll be paid for and paid heavy for. If it come to be throwed upon you, you was to be ready to throw it upon me, was you? Where else but in Plashwater Weir Mill Lock was there a man dressed according as described? Where else but in Plashwater Weir Mill Lock was there a man as had had words with him coming through in his boat? Look at the Lock-keeper in Plashwater Weir Mill Lock, in them same answering clothes and with that same answering red neckhankercher, and see whether his clothes happens to be bloody or not. Yes, they do happen to be bloody. Ah, you sly devil!"

Bradley, very white, sat looking at him in silence.

"But two could play at your game," said Riderhood. "I don't care a curse for the T'other governor, alive or dead, but I care a many curses for my own self. And as you laid your plots agin me and was a sly devil agin me, I'll be paid for it—I'll be paid for it—till I've drained you dry!"

"You can't get blood out of a stone, Riderhood."

"I can get money out of a schoolmaster though."

"You can't get out of me what is not in me. You can't wrest from me what I have not got. Mine is but a poor calling. You have had more than two guineas from me, already. Do you know how long it has taken me (allowing for a long and arduous training) to earn such a sum?"

"I don't know, nor I don't care. Yours is a 'spectable calling. To save your 'spectability, it's worth your while to pawn every article of clothes you've got, sell every stick in your house, and beg and borrow every penny you can get trusted with. When you've done that and handed over, I'll leave you. Not afore."

"How do you mean, you'll leave me?"

"I mean as I'll keep you company, wherever you go, when you go away from here. Let the lock take care of itself. I'll take care of you, once I've got you."

"Riderhood," said Bradley, after a long silence, drawing out his purse and putting it on the table, "Say I part with this, which is all the money I have; say I let you have my watch; say that every quarter, when I draw my salary, I pay you a certain portion of it."

"Say nothink of the sort. You've got away once, and I won't run the chance agin. I'll have one settlement with you for good and all."

"Riderhood, I am a man who has lived a retired life. I have no resources beyond myself. I have absolutely no friends."

"That's a lie," said Riderhood. "You've got one friend as I knows of; one as is good for a savings-bank book, or I'm a blue monkey! I went into the wrong shop, fust, last Thursday. Found myself among the young ladies, by George! Over the young ladies, I see a Missis. That Missis is sweet enough upon you, Master, to sell herself up, slap, to get you out of trouble. Make her do it then."

"You spoke to the mistress, did you?" inquired Bradley.

"Poof! Yes," said Riderhood. "I didn't say much to her. She was put in a fluster by my dropping in among the young ladies (I never did set up for a lady's man), and she took me into her parlor to hope as there was nothink wrong. I tells her, 'O no, nothink wrong. The master's my very good friend.' But I see how the land laid, and that she was comfortable off. She couldn't live more handy to you than she does, and when I goes home with you (as of course I am a-going), I recommend you to clean her out without loss of time. You can marry her arter you and me have come to a settlement. She's nice-looking, and I know you can't be keeping company with no one else, having been so lately disapinted in another quarter."

Not one other word did Bradley utter all that night. Rigid before the fire, as if it were a charmed flame that was turning him old, he sat, with the dark lines deepening in his face, its stare becoming more and more haggard, its surface turning whiter and whiter as if it were being overspread with ashes, and the very texture and color of his hair degenerating.

Not until the late daylight made the window transparent,

did this decaying statue move. Then it slowly arose, and sat in the window looking out.

Riderhood had kept his chair all night. He was making some disorderly preparations for coffee, when Bradley came from the window and put on his outer coat and hat.

"Hadn't us better have a bit o' breakfast afore we start?" said Riderhood. "It ain't good to freeze a empty stomach, Master."

Without a sign to show that he heard, Bradley walked out of the lock-house. Catching up from the table a piece of bread, and taking his bargeman's bundle under his arm, Riderhood immediately followed him. Bradley turned towards London. Riderhood caught him up, and walked at his side.

The two men trudged on, side by side, in silence, full three miles. Suddenly, Bradley turned to retrace his course. Riderhood turned likewise, and they went back side by side.

Bradley re-entered the lock-house. So did Riderhood. Bradley sat down in the window. Riderhood warmed himself at the fire. After an hour or more, Bradley abruptly got up again, and again went out, but this time turned the other way. Riderhood was close after him, caught him up in a few paces, and walked at his side.

This time, as before, when he found his attendant not to be shaken off, Bradley suddenly turned back. This time, as before, Riderhood turned back along with him. But, not this time, as before, did they go into the lock-house, for Bradley came to a stand on the snow-covered turf by the lock, looking up the river and down the river. Navigation was impeded by the frost, and the scene was a mere white and yellow desert.

"Come, come, Master," urged Riderhood, at his side. "This is a dry game. And where's the good of it? You can't get rid of me, except by coming to a settlement. I am a-going along with you wherever you go."

Without a word of reply, Bradley passed quickly from him over the wooden bridge on the lock gates. "Why, there's even less sense in this move than t'other," said Riderhood, following. "The Weir's there, and you'll have to come back, you know."

Without taking the least notice, Bradley leaned his body

against a post, and there rested with his eyes cast down. "Being brought here," said Riderhood, "I'll turn it to some use by changing my gates." With a rattle and a rush of water, he then swung to the lock gates that were standing open. So, both sets of gates were for the moment closed.

"You'd better by far be reasonable, Bradley Headstone, Master," said Riderhood, passing him, "or I'll drain you all the dryer for it, when we do settle.—Ah! Would you!"

Bradley had caught him round the body. He seemed to be girdled with an iron ring. They were on the brink of the lock, about midway between the two sets of gates.

"Let go!" said Riderhood, "or I'll get my knife out and slash you wherever I can cut you. Let go!"

Bradley was drawing to the lock-edge. Riderhood was drawing away from it. It was a strong grapple, and a fierce struggle, arm and leg. Bradley got him round, with his back to the lock, and still worked him backward.

"Let go!" said Riderhood. "Stop! What are you trying at? You can't drown Me. Ain't I told you that a man as has come through drowning can never be drowned? I can't be drowned."

"I can be!" returned Bradley, in a desperate, clenched voice. "I am resolved to be. I'll hold you living, and I'll hold you dead. Come down!"

Riderhood went over into the smooth pit, backwards, and Bradley Headstone upon him. When the two were found, lying under the ooze and scum behind one of the rotting gates, Riderhood's hold had relaxed, probably in falling, and his eyes were staring upward. But he was girdled still with Bradley's iron ring, and the rivets of the iron ring held tight.

CHAPTER LVIII.

MR. AND MRS. JOHN HARMON'S first delightful occupation was, to set all matters right that had strayed in any way wrong, or that might, could, would, or should have strayed in any way wrong, while their name was in abeyance. In tracing out affairs for which John's fictitious death was to be considered in any way responsible, they

used a very broad and free construction ; regarding, for instance, the dolls' dressmaker as having a claim on their protection, because of her association with Mrs. Eugene Wrayburn, and because of Mrs. Eugene's old association, in her turn, with the dark side of the story. It followed that the old man, Riah, as a good and serviceable friend to both, was not to be disclaimed. Nor even Mr. Inspector, as having been trepanned into an industrious hunt on a false scent.

In all their arrangements of such nature, Mr. and Mrs. John Harmon derived much assistance from their eminent solicitor, Mr. Mortimer Lightwood ; who laid about him professionally with such unwonted dispatch and intention, that a piece of work was vigorously pursued as soon as cut out ; whereby Young Blight was acted on as by that transatlantic dram which is poetically named *An Eye-Opener*, and found himself staring at real clients instead of out of window. The accessibility of Riah proving very useful as to a few hints towards the disentanglement of Eugene's affairs, Lightwood applied himself with infinite zest to attacking and harassing Mr. Fledgeby ; who, discovering himself in danger of being blown into the air by certain explosive transactions in which he had been engaged, and having been sufficiently flayed under his beating, came to a parley and asked for quarter. The harmless Twemlow profited by the conditions entered into, though he little thought it. Mr. Riah unaccountably melted ; waited in person on him over the stable yard in Duke Street, St. James's, no longer ravening but mild, to inform him that payment of interest as heretofore, but henceforth at Mr. Lightwood's offices, would appease his Jewish rancor ; and departed with the secret that Mr. John Harmon had advanced the money and become the creditor.

Mrs. Wilfer's first visit to the Mendicant's bride at the new abode of Mendicancy, was a grand event. The carriage was sent for Ma, who entered it with a bearing worthy of the occasion, accompanied, rather than supported, by Miss Lavinia, who altogether declined to recognize the maternal majesty. Mr. George Sampson meekly followed. Pa had been sent for into the City, on the very day of taking

possession, and had been stunned with astonishment, and brought to, and led about the house by one ear, to behold its various treasures, and had been enraptured and enchanted. Pa had also been appointed Secretary, and had been enjoined to give instant notice of resignation to Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles, for ever and ever.

But the greatest event of all, in the new life of Mr. and Mrs. John Harmon, was a visit from Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Wrayburn. Sadly wan and worn was the once gallant Eugene, and walked resting on his wife's arm, and leaning heavily upon a stick. But he was daily growing stronger and better, and it was declared by the medical attendants that he might not be much disfigured by-and-by. It was a grand event, indeed, when Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Wrayburn came to stay at Mr. and Mrs. John Harmon's house; where, by the way, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin (exquisitely happy, and daily cruising about, to look at shops) were likewise staying indefinitely.

THE END.





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